

CPD whole school activities

CPD activity 2: 'Contentious' issues

Dealing with some of the issues related to Global Citizenship, such as poverty, the effects of globalisation, and human rights might present educators with some difficulties. Such issues may also seem contentions, although each of us will have our own view about this. Bringing global issues to a local (personal or classroom) level and working on possible solutions to problems is one starting point.

Aims:

To show that there are parallels between global and local issues and for educators to address 'contentious' issues.

What to do - Part A:

This exercise is adapted from Brownlie (1995:13).

This activity could also be done with pupils, in which case try to de-personalise issues as far as possible, and allow time for pupils to talk about things individually with you if they wish.

1. Give one A4 copy of the **worksheet: Global issues and Classroom issues** (below) to each group of participants.
2. As a whole group, discuss the lists to ensure participants' understanding of each term.
3. In groups, ask the participants to link the global and classroom issues. (Note that the order of the entries under each heading is not intentionally matched, and each issue has more than one link.)
4. Ask participants to note some real examples of each of the classroom issues.
5. Ask them to decide on one issue which they feel would present them with particular difficulties in the classroom. Together, formulate possible strategies for dealing with this situation.
6. Share these strategies with the whole group, and discuss whether existing school policies and practice incorporate them already, or should incorporate them.
7. End the session by reflecting on the **Dear Teacher letter** (below) (Steiner 1993:12).

What to do - Part B:

1. Give out a copy of the **worksheet: Discussion prompts** and ask participants to jot down the implications of some or all of these statements for their work in school.
2. In a feedback session, ask one group to lead on each issue, and then open up for wider discussion.

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Worksheet: Global issues and classroom issues

Global issues	Classroom issues
Environmental awareness	Name calling
Peace and conflict	Arguing over things
Justice	Excluding others
Interdependence	Complaining that things aren't fair
Discrimination	Wasting things
Distribution of resources	Sharing
Prejudice	Fighting
Choice and action	Deciding what to do

Worksheet: Dear teacher letter

Dear Teacher

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers; children poisoned by educated physicians; infants killed by trained nurses; women and babies shot by high-school and college graduates.

So I am suspicious of education.

My request is: help your students to become more human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.

Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

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Worksheet: Discussion prompts

1. Many problems such as wars and famine may be complex and difficult for children as well as adults to understand. However, children often experience the basic concepts behind such issues. Both in and out of school, children are often encouraged to play with others without fighting, to share things, and to take turns. They will also feel that some things are fair or unfair, and will meet kindness as well as unkindness.

2. In some cases, the children in our classrooms have themselves been subject to human rights violations: they may be refugees, they may have witnessed violent scenes, and they may have been abused. To avoid 'contentious issues', or to pretend they do not occur, or to regard them as unsuitable for particular age groups, is to deny the real lives of some children.

3. To avoid addressing racism is tantamount to supporting it. As suggested by the teacher educator Russell Jones (1999:161), the negative experiences of schooling gained by many black children in our society are 'the consequence of silence'.

4. Teaching children to think about controversial issues is important in the development of critical thinking skills. Children need to be able to weigh up different viewpoints and distinguish between fact and opinion if they are to hold reasoned views.