

TASK 5 "CONFLICTS"



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Brief Task 5 "Conflicts"

Introduction

Many children were very concerned about the terror acts in September 2001. Most of our participating children didn't miss the continuous news pictures. The media presentations of the World Trade Centre bombing and the following months of the 'War on Terror' provide many ideas for further discussion and dialogue and fit well into the framework of our project (read Barry Duncan's comprehensive Bulletin with lots of concrete ideas how the subject can be handled: <http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/med/class/multilib/oct2001.htm>).

The events of September 11th will not be in the centre of the new task but rather in the background. We would like to start the task with the search for conflicts in our immediate surrounding and evaluate them. As a second step we can explore avenues of national and international problems. When we talk about conflicts we also want to explore possible solutions for them.

Some of you may remember task 1 'School News' with an article by Max (from the Berlin class) about 'conflicts and resolution of conflicts'. The article concentrated on fights in the playground. The publication of the article provoked a lot of interest in the school and raised in particular one question: Were the fights we saw in the article real? We will go back to that article and discuss it again with the current participating children. You will receive a new copy of the edited article, the original footage and a transcription.

It would be helpful if you can document parts of the task process with the video camera (we discussed this in Berlin and you may remember Javier's excellent documentation of task 4) and encourage the children to reflect on what we do. This might be especially useful in larger classes where only part of the class takes part in class discussions.

Since even a local reference to 'conflicts' can raise highly contradictive and personal issues it is very important that you as the teacher moderate the whole sequence of the task carefully and make sure that we don't create even further conflicts with what we do. It might for example be helpful as if you inform the parents about what you plan to do to avoid misunderstandings.

You will find enclosed several ideas of what could be done in the next months. Take these as possibilities and adapt the sequence according to your situation in the classroom, size of the class and timetable.

Find enclosed a suggested sequence of how task 5 could be implemented.



Proposed Sequence

1. Discussion (record with video camera)

- Conflicts in my environment
 - What is a conflict?
 - Do you have any conflicts?
 - in your environment, at home, in the classroom
 - Can these conflicts be solved? How?
- Conflicts in the 'world'
 - Which conflicts have you seen on television?
 - Are these real conflicts?
 - Are there any resolutions for those conflicts?
 - What did you think about September 11th, how did you feel?
- Send selected material to Berlin
- Options
 - Create images (paintings) depicting conflicts
 - Look into songs about war and peace
 - Discuss terrorism, nationalism (e.g. waving flags)

2. Case study 'Conflicts - Resolving Conflicts'

- Look at the contents of the article from task 1 (you will get a transcription). You could discuss following statements:
 - "conflicts are something we experience everyday"
 - "every conflict has a solution"
 - "our group found a solution"
 - "you shouldn't feel threatened"
- Look at the form (images, sound, editing) of the article from task 1
 - Compare the article with the original footage
 - Are those 'real' images?
 - Are images in television real?
 - Have you seen any fake images?
 - How could that be done?
- Edit Exercise
 - Reedit the article
 - Use the same material and observe how the result of the article might change with different material
 - Experiment with different soundtracks to see how the result is changed, ask other children how they perceive the different versions you created



- Options
 - Record your own images in your playground
 - Record your own 'real' images (hide the camera, ...)
 - Record your own 'fake' images (stage something, ..)
 - Create your own article about conflicts in the playground

3. Taking positive steps

- What can we do as a team in different countries to create a better understanding/divert conflicts?
 - What short (2 minute) video article could we produce?
 - Plan, design and produce your article
- This final piece will be used in the final conference/celebration in Berlin as well
 - Something specific for that?

4. Exchange and Evaluation

- Exchange of videos
- Evaluation of the material (your own and the partners material)
 - What have the partners done?
 - Where have they set their focus?
 - How did they bring their concerns across?
- Broadcasting in the Open Channel Berlin

During the task

- Communicate with each other through email
- Document the task using the video camera
- Encourage the children to write about how they did the task (this can be put on the website)



Evaluation Task 5 "Conflicts"

February – June 2002

Task: Produce a short article related to the theme of 'conflicts'
Main focus of contents: Examining conflicts in one's surroundings and in the 'media'

Introduction

"Conflicts' was exciting - we learnt not only how they happen but how to solve them." (Isabel, year 3)

Conflicts are everywhere and they happen at any time. We didn't anticipate further tragic events after September 11th so quickly. The school massacre in Erfurt shook the whole of Germany but especially children and teachers in the schools here. Why did such an event happen? Why can a school evoke such horrible feelings of hate and revenge? The Berlin children discussed the Erfurt events for a long time and talked about possible solutions. These might not always be as easy to find as Isabel above believes. Nevertheless - a discussion about conflicts could be a constructive start and may contribute to developing longer term solutions.

The following description and evaluation will give a brief insight into the project work of the four teams looking into what they have done and suggesting avenues for further discussion.

Description of the task

The teams mainly followed the proposed sequence of the task 5 brief (see online brief) but placed their own individual focus in their article. The themes of the articles covered three different areas:

- Conflicts in the school
- Conflicts related to the school massacre in Erfurt
- Conflicts in newspapers and television programmes (predominantly about Israel)

The format of the articles was either a short play, an imitation of a TV news programme or a combination of both approaches. The children worked, as in the previous tasks, in groups of three or four and produced the following:

- Team Haifa (Israel):
 - *Article:* A series of street interviews about people's views of the war and possible solutions.
- Team Segovia (Spain):
 - *Article:* 'Coats' – showing a conflict over coat hooks in the classroom (a genuine conflict for the class)



- *Article:* Two interviews concerning conflicts in Israel and Afghanistan using footage from television news programmes.
- *Article:* A documentation about the 'Day of Peace' – 30th January 2002.
- Team Cheadle Hulme (England):
 - *Article:* A series of posters showing a wide range of conflicts, done by the whole class (for the actual words see subtitles)
 - *Article:* Playstation Conflict (children fight over a computer)
 - *Article:* News at Ten (children are not allowed out by their parents)
 - *Article:* Dinner-time News (fighting in the playground)
 - *Article:* Child shouts at Teacher (a conflict while playing football)
 - *Article:* Television Conflict (brother and sister fight over the television)
- Team Berlin (Germany):
 - *Article:* Fight in the classroom (a short play)
 - *Article:* Cheating during an exam (a short play)
 - *Article:* The arrogant child (a short play)
 - *Article:* Conflicts in the newspaper (a short report)
 - *Article:* Conflicts in Israel (looking into television news)
 - *Article:* The massacre in Erfurt (documentation of a conflict workshop)

The brief did not include any internet elements this time although we helped establish an internet community (called 'Us and Them') on the EUN network. Here we brought in our project experiences and displayed some of the results of our project. Most of the articles were edited by the children themselves, a lot of the editing took place in Berlin and Haifa. All of the material was broadcast on the Open Channel Berlin, a local television station in Segovia reported about the project work in the Spanish school (click here for the QuickTime clip).

Evaluation of the task

"In news organisations, conflicts, disputes, disagreements are to be expected and defined as appropriate." (Bantz in Tumber, 134)

Our final task returned to the genre of television news and approached the core of the news industry: the selling of conflicts. News is all about conflicts happening around the viewer, more immediate or further away.

Let us first turn to something which is immediate to all of the children: the conflicts in the school. A simple comparison of the school related articles shows many similarities. Fighting did not only appear in the news programme of the first task but in a lot of articles of this final task: fighting in the playground, in the classroom, over a computer or playstation, during football or over a coat hook. When asked about conflicts fighting was quickly mentioned by most of the children – especially the boys.



It was easy to raise the issue of conflicts, but it became harder when we were dealing with possible solutions of those conflicts. Some quick ideas were displayed in the articles by the children: A 'We are friends again' imposed by the teacher, a telling off or an immediate punishment. The Spanish team discussed this for a longer time, "they also found out that there are some other ways to solve a conflict between themselves instead of 'hard' arguments or fighting" (Javier Coco González). The creation of name labels for their coats hooks was their constructive answer to the fights which happened in the past.

The conflicts in the playground need also further attention - just 'being friends again' isn't necessarily the final step in solving the tension. What ways of communication should we develop between each other? How should we behave towards each other? How can we show respect during the break? How could the playground itself be changed to help children to be less physical with each other?

The Berlin team looked into another possible approach and invited two psychologists for a four day conflict workshop to get external help. The experts introduced lots of short exercises with the goal of encouraging more positive communication between each other: to become more aware of yourself, to talk with somebody you haven't talked before or to look into each others eyes. The Erfurt massacre just incidentally happened during that workshop and the 'conflict experts' tried to engage with the emotions the children were experiencing. What did you feel when you heard the first time about the massacre? What went through your head? Why do you think this happened?

Dealing with the 'distant media' we were intrigued about the amount of information children pick up from news programmes and newspapers although these are not part of their favourite media sources. The children had no first hand experience, but heard about Erfurt only through the media. This could have been another interesting area to consider. How has the incident been shown? What did they show, what didn't they show? One of the Spanish interviews dealt with the conflicts between the Israelis and the Palestinians and they asked each other: "How did you hear about it? - Through the media. .. Did you get information in some other way? - No."

At this point the street interviews from our Israel team were very interesting. There were suddenly images from Israel *not coming* from an institutionalised, globally controlled news programme but images made by children - not showing the cliché fighting shots. These images from the children can help to widen our perspective, although the problem still remains: What do we know apart from what we received from the media?

To examine how different cultures are represented in the media is an important part of intercultural education. 'Conflicts' in that sense has been a worthwhile conclusion to our three year television news project and has kept up our discussion about TV programmes and our relationship to them.



References

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