

Teaching for **SOLIDARITY**

Vision and Values – a community cohesion project

Teachers' notes

Aims:

- Explore
- Go deep
- Challenge
- Reflect
- Understand
- Act!

A note on the title, Vision and Values

Change is implicit in the title. It aims to convey the idea of working towards making visions (of community cohesion) a reality, based on values e.g. mutual respect, fairness, justice. We are committed to people from diverse backgrounds sharing their stories, celebrating their diversity, wrestling with the conflicts that arise in order to make something creative, learning from new perspectives and finding the common threads. Though we can teach about values, they cannot be taught like knowledge and skills, they are learned more by example e.g. listen to and respect the views of others and practice reconciliation; Find your own convictions and commitments; exercise friendship; endeavour to see the needs of others as your own; reduce discrimination; increase freedom and equality.

Timing

As always, time will be limited. Each activity or source could lead to extensive discussion. It would be ideal if staff could find time slots longer than regular lessons but we realise how difficult that is. Timings for activities are approximate.

Reflection

It is highly desirable that students have time for reflection at the end of each session, whether written or recorded. Author Joan Didion (quoted in Facing History's *Race and Membership*) says, 'I write entirely to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means.'

Aiming for depth

Ted Huddleston, in his 2007 report for ACT (Association for Citizenship Teaching, see references below) identified trends in some materials which focus on identity and belonging. He found too many of them: repetitive; not demanding intellectually; with

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little sense of progression; don't always engage with the complexities of real life; emphasise attitude development; included little on local identity/Britishness/European identity. He said: the use of history is often uncritical and there is not enough about different types of identity, how identities can conflict within and between each other; How culture does not stand still, it changes, even if very slowly. He said most resources are aimed at changing attitudes/dispositions, either affirming their own sense of identity/culture or removing their prejudices against certain ethnic minority groups, recent migrants, refugees or asylum seekers – rather than encouraging a critical exploration and understanding of the issues concerned. Typically students are encouraged to see diversity as 'enriching' rather than problematic or 'political'. We have tried to address his findings and offer some more critical, political insights.

Citizenship

The sessions are linked to many aspects of the curriculum but have been developed within a Citizenship context – exploring justice, rights, responsibilities, equity, democracy, communities and media, particularly the increased emphasis on diversity, identity and belonging. Citizenship aims to encourage concern for the common good; belief in human dignity and equality; concern to resolve conflicts; a disposition to work with and for others; courage to defend a point of view; determination to act justly; concern for human rights. Pupils are encouraged to use skills of rational discussion and to learn the values necessary for people with different views about society to engage in reasoned dialogue about what kind of society they would like to live in.

In Session Two there is an opportunity to begin with reference to some of the results of fear of difference and discrimination which can be toxic. There are many uncomfortable questions related to diversity and difference e.g. Why is homophobia still widely acceptable and why is the Anglican Church obsessed by it when millions are starving? Why is the number of Black people in prison so disproportionately high? Why is the Bangladeshi community in London so poor? Why are there so few women in Parliament? **These are key Citizenship questions.**

Controversy

The question of what is 'allowed' to be said during these debates, in the media, by politicians and in schools, can be highly flammable and very often tiptoed around. We hope this project will confront prejudices and lead to real dialogue. Hopefully these themes will generate lively, heated, passionate discussion and that's why establishing ground rules and the difference between judging a person and their opinions is vital. The group needs to find that fine balance between freedom of speech and respect for everyone's views.

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Session One - You: Your identity and sense of belonging

Introduce the whole project and emphasise they are part of a bigger initiative.

Ground Rules – might not be necessary if you have already established a clear way of working with your group. But in case this is a new group to you. We realise it's hard to run an activity as outlined in this way, in a regular classroom.

Definition of community cohesion – although the focus of Session Three is community cohesion, we thought it was important to agree on a definition first. Of course there are many. What is a safe community? Integrated and tolerant?

Definition of community cohesion

Community cohesion means:

- A common vision and sense of belonging by all communities
- Diversity appreciated and valued
- Similar life opportunities for all
- Strong and positive relations in schools and the wider community

And looks at how people and communities can improve their quality of life by building a better understanding of the things they have in common, so removing the focus on the things that keep them apart. How can we build on the many ways people have already established of living together at ease? We need to consider divisions and **connections** around class, age, disability, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and faith without creating or reinforcing differences.

Why start with your own identity? How is that linked to community cohesion? You need to make the link and establish that there can only be cohesion if individuals and groups have a sense of significance, being valued, accepted, at ease, belonging, security, friendship, connection and loyalty.

Extra quotes if you need them: 'I'm black, I live in London – that's my home. My parents are from the Caribbean but I'm really African. I'm a Christian, but I'm E7 – that's where I hang, they're my people. That's who I am.' (Year 9 pupil quoted in Ajegbo, K., Kiwan, Dr D., Sharma, S. (2007) Report: *Identity and Diversity: Living Together in the UK*)

'I am lots of things. I am Bangladeshi, British, a Muslim, female and also the daughter of working class parents. There are lots of things that define what I am, and I don't think I want to be categorised under one label set by someone else. What does it mean to be British nowadays? Do you have to like fish and chips?' Layli (*Vibes and Voices* March 2006)

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Some say it's essential to understand your history in order to understand your identity. This is a concern identified in *Identity and Diversity: Living Together in the UK* about the identity and achievement of many white working class boys.

Session Two - Difference and diversity

Ted Cantle opens his book *Community Cohesion – a new framework for race and diversity* by asking whether the idea of peace and harmony between different communities is 'a naïve pipe dream [because] what could be more understandable than wanting to favour our own kind? Surely it is natural to be suspicious about people who appear not to be "like us"'. He examines the feelings associated with talk of 'them' and 'us', often creating fear, panic, hostility and hatred. It is so easy to depict people as 'aliens' or 'other'. Who are 'we'? He then goes on to remind us that ethnic conflict is in fact rare, many mixed communities do live in harmony, that ideas about who is 'different' change over time and indeed that 'difference' is nothing to be feared for many people. On the contrary, they see it as enriching, adding interest and pleasure.

He reminds us that migration, global communication, international trade, business and tourism mean even greater diversity is inevitable. 'The challenge for us then, is to make multi-faith, multi-ethnic and multicultural communities work.' He also talks about the alienating experience of feeling disadvantaged with no real opportunities to grow and develop – which is the case for people of all backgrounds. Cantle also writes about the need to look beyond the 'race debate'. "'Fear of difference' is by no means confined to ethnic and faith divisions. Gays and lesbians, travellers and people characterised as 'disabled' face issues which are similar, with perceived notions and stereotypes creating barriers and allowing discriminatory behavior to be justified on the basis of imagined inequality.' **Consider the social vs. medical model of disability.**

Disabled people (this term is used to include people with learning difficulties, people experiencing mental and emotional distress and people with physical and sensory impairment). 70% of disabled people's impairments will not be readily apparent to you when you first meet the person e.g. epilepsy or asthma.

There are various reasons why people with disabilities are disempowered. One important reason is the 'model' of thinking that many people have. A model is a certain way of seeing things. It is a framework that forms the basis of a set of beliefs or ideas. Different models are used by different political parties, religions and cultures and of course there are differences within those categories too.

The **social model** of disability has been created by Disabled People and is a way of seeing us that is more accurate and therefore more useful and empowering. It sees us as people who are disabled by all the barriers that exist in society: barriers of attitudes, of economics, of the way things are organised and of the built environment. This model looks at our life experiences rather than just focusing on impairment. It sees a solution to the problems of disablement – society as a whole trying to remove all the barriers which

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currently restrict our lives. We need to break down barriers in order to break down prejudice and intolerance.

The social model accepts that people with disabilities have impairments or experience mental and emotional distress which hamper them at certain times and which may or may not need medical treatment. It is not those impairments which disable us most: it is the way society is arranged.

The **medical model** of disability sees Disabled People as the problem. We are to be adapted to fit into the world as it is. If this is not possible, then we are shut away in some specialised institution or isolated at home, where only our basic needs are met. The medical model emphasises the 'dependence' of Disabled People, with accompanying attitudes of pity, fear and patronage. Usually the impairment is focused on, rather than the needs of the person. The power to change us to fit in with society seems to lie with the medical and associated professions, with their talk of cures, normalisation and science. Often our lives are handed over to them.

Cantle refers to the 'parallel lives' in some areas of the UK, recognises that separation offers security for some groups but suggests that in the rare places where there are apparently rigid layers of separation and a complete lack of contact in schools, community organisations, shops, places of worship, social networks, there is a profound impact in terms of ignorance, fear and suspicion. Many very wealthy people never take public transport, shop or are educated with anyone who is not also wealthy. Many of the richest people stand apart from any communal bind and have no idea what it means to be poor.

We need to understand why communities stick together and how to reinforce commonality? We need to get students to examine the concept of 'us' and 'them' and how we perceive 'difference' and 'other communities'. To understand it and the dangers of categorising people, labelling them, leading to fear, social tension, hostility and even war. We need to look at how groups develop their own framework for gaining status, how people understand their own status and how that status fits a central narrative and if you're not close to the central narrative you know you don't matter. Who a person is in terms of gender, race, sexuality etc. can determine whether they are included or excluded and creates truths and social/political 'in-groups' and 'out groups'.

Psychology experiments have investigated people's instincts to connect with/help those they perceive as 'being like me' e.g. A study which observed what happened when a man looking as if he lived on the streets pretended to collapse on Liverpool Street station steps (he was ignored by most passersby) compared to when the same man dressed as a City worker pretended to collapse (lots of passersby helped him). Why is everyone not seen as equal? Those concerned argue that we need links, 'social capital', trust and dialogue.

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There are numerous domains of difference e.g. Visible; linguistic; different experience and history; faith and beliefs; political and civic engagement; economic; lifestyle/social; symbols and ceremonies. Do they matter? Why should we care? Are some differences more challenging than others? Does focusing on them create artificial problems? What are the consequences of hostility to 'others'. Why does it matter? Is the aim to acknowledge, respect, understand difference but not treat everyone the same? Communities must be able to talk to one another. Overcoming the 'fear of difference' is crucial in order to produce cohesion, but first we have to understand where the fear comes from.

Theories about where fear of difference come from: National and international order (Cantle describes how each nation has its own hierarchy of nations); a certain teaching in some religions about hierarchies and elites. Slavery was sanctified by the Pope in 1452. Pope Nicholas V gave Portugal the right to conquer and enslave Africans; How do we learn which differences between people are supposed to matter? Psychological theories (about personality differences); Scientific theories about race; Sociological theories (customs, beliefs, norms of majority communities); learnt fear, uncertainty anxiety – the instinct to protect ourselves which can be quite animalistic; education, schools as social institutions produce and reproduce power relations; Mass manipulation and hysteria whipped up by the media e.g. about asylum seekers or Muslims.

“Whatever lay at the root of British hostility to foreigners, through the slave trade it achieved a new and clearer definition. From now on, Britons would think of themselves as 'white', as if this alone was a suggestive and meaningful quality.” (Robert Winder)

Race is the deepest schism in our society/history/culture/psychology – do you agree? David Lammy MP described being in Africa and the Caribbean and, 'not having to feel difference every day of your life...The relief!...I am never anonymous in the Palace of Westminster and sometimes you just wish you could be.' (quoted on BBC Radio 4 12th August 2008)

We must not shy away from tension around housing, health, education, welfare services and immigration. Many teachers talk about the hostility felt by their students towards more recent (white) immigrants. Many people feel threatened and diminished not enriched by the arrival/existence of those seen as 'other'.

“It is ignorance about refugees that breeds prejudice and resentment and hate and fear.” Is that true?

However, for many immigrants, the UK has been/is a wonderful society. They describe a 'live and let live' atmosphere, where, 'No-one asks where I'm from nor do they tell me their problems. Nobody greatly cares. British tolerance meets British indifference.' (Eva

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Hoffman) She describes Britain as a 'Great arch through which I pass with my languages and places.'

Salman Rushdie, 'The immigrant is not only transformed by his new world, he also transforms his world.'

Cantle makes it clear that, 'community cohesion cannot claim to be the complete answer to the challenge [of developing more mutual respect and contact] but does represent an attempt to both understand the basis of prejudice and resulting discriminatory behaviour and to confront their causes.'

Session Three - Community cohesion

Introducing students to the concept of '**ubuntu**'. 'A commitment to the community, a sense that my connectedness is bound up with your connectedness.' We thought examining the idea of Ubuntu and why it seems so hard to achieve, might be a useful way in to community cohesion. You could link this with the John O'Donohue reading in Session 2?

Examples of friendship and unity between people and why they work. Professor Lisa Jardine advocates: shared endeavour, doing things together with mutual dependency. Share responsibility, care for each other and then we will all be safer and connected. Sylvia Lancaster, the mother of Sophie who was murdered for being a Goth in 2007 has established **The Sophie Lancaster Foundation**. The family provides training to professionals in order to raise awareness of the prejudice and violence faced by people from alternative subcultures. They have developed and delivered workshops tackling the issues and challenging pre-conceptions. They want to offer advice and information to whoever may need it, continuing the social and political campaign through the **S.O.P.H.I.E.** Campaign. The aims of the fund are to provide an appropriate memorial; a lasting legacy to raise awareness of the injustice perpetrated against Sophie Lancaster and to work towards a more tolerant, less violent society.

David Oddie creates arts projects which aim for a more peaceful world by developing a global network of young people, artists and educators who share stories, build bridges and challenge prejudices. He runs drama workshops for teenagers in conflict areas e.g. Gaza, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, South Africa. Based on self expression, young people learn about each other. 'They move away from stereotypes and begin to understand the commonality between them.'

'If we could but recognise our common humanity, that we do belong together, that our destinies are bound up in one another's, that we can be free only together, that we can survive only together, that we can be human only together, then a glorious world would come into being where all of us lived harmoniously together as members of one family, one human family.' (Desmond Tutu)

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'We have tended to treat the weak, the poor, the unemployed; the failures with disdain because success and power have become the gods at whose altars we have burned incense and bowed the knee. We have tended to be embarrassed by compassion and caring things that were inappropriate in the harsh, callous world of business.' (Tutu)

'Our worth is intrinsic to who we are, depending on nothing extrinsic, whether it be achievement, race, gender or whatever else. What does the color of one's skin tell us that is of any significance about a person? Nothing, of course, absolutely nothing. It does not say whether the person is warmhearted or kind, clever, witty or whether that person is good.' (Tutu)

'When you have a hand and you only have the separate fingers, it is easy for people to break the fingers. But when you put the fingers together it is difficult to break them. Let us come together and be one, let us be people of peace, let us be people of harmony.' (Tutu)

'Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world.' (Eleanor Roosevelt)

Gary Younger 'We are the ones we've been waiting for.'

Margaret Mead 'A small group of people can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has.'

Nelson Mandela 'It's in our hands'

The idea of loyalty to humankind:

'So perhaps if we can identify each other as all belonging to the human race, no-one's cries for help will be ignored.' (Claudia Hammond, BBC Radio 4, July 2008) Talking about the Bystander Effect in the case of Kitty Genovese who was stabbed to death in New York in 1964. 38 witnesses failed to come to help her

References

Huddleston, T. (2007) *Identity, Diversity and Citizenship – A Critical review of Educational Resources for ACT*, October 2007 www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk (includes lists of useful resources)

Winder, Robert (2004) *Bloody Foreigners* Little Brown

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