

Jenga – Stability and Structures of Peace in Schools

Audience: Teachers

Rationale: *In his article, “Safety from the Inside Out: Rethinking Traditional Approaches”, Alfie Kohn writes that zero-tolerance policies and technical fixes, such as installing dozens of surveillance cameras and metal detectors as a way to make schools safer, have paradoxically resulted in schools becoming less safe. With metal detectors and cameras, students might be “safe” but only because certain mechanisms are in place to restrict perpetrators or physical weapons from this environment. What happens when these mechanisms aren’t in place? This test will help initiating the process of determining the presence of an underlying problem of violent conflict in our communities. It is our mission as peace teachers to begin to address the needs of students and create a culture of peace – where peace in this sense is something greater and more profound than just the absence of violence. In this exercise, teachers will have the opportunity to reflect on this topic by engaging in an abstract (visual-spatial), analogous activity.*

Objectives: By the end of this activity, teachers will be able to:

- Recognize the relationship between peace and violence and also define each concept as itself and not as the absence of the other.
- Create a vision and “recipe” for a safe and peaceful school.
- Critically examine the policies and/or programs implemented in their schools to address violence.
- Discuss the ways in which a school could create, support, and sustain a peaceful environment without the use of zero-tolerance policies and technical fixes.
- Identify root causes of violence in their schools.

Materials:

- Two sets of Jenga
- Red and Green Round Stickers
- Peace & Violence Graphic Organizer
- Tables/Chairs

Time: 1 Hour

Procedures:

8 min: Independent- Teachers will first individually brainstorm and take notes on their conception and definitions of peace and violence in the graphic organizer (both as they relate to one another and as a stand alone concept that does not comprise its definition by the absence of the other).

6 min: Small Group – Depending on the number of teachers present, participants will break up into small groups and share their ideas with one another.

15 min: Whole Group – Teachers add “ingredients” to a recipe for a safe and peaceful school. Facilitator adds participants’ comments and ideas to this recipe/vision and puts checks next to ideas that others agree upon.

7 min: (pre set-up time required): Two Groups – One group works with the premade Jenga structure on table 1. The second group plays with the Jenga structure on table 2. Some blocks are marked with red round stickers and the others are marked with green round stickers. Both groups must remove all the red pieces one by one while keeping the structure intact (this slight variation to original Jenga game as players will not add pieces to top of structure.)

Description of set-up: This activity involves two Jenga sets that each has pieces that are marked either red or green (with the round colored stickers). Table 1 has a Jenga structure where all of the bottom rows are green and the upper rows are red. Table 2 has a Jenga structure where the red and green pieces are mixed. Players are not yet told what each color signifies, and only that the red needs to be removed one at a time. The directions of the game vary slightly from the original version. After each red piece is removed, it should be put aside instead of placed on top of structure.

Essentially, the stability of the Jenga structure represents the stability of school safety & peace. The red pieces represent all of the defense mechanisms that many schools use to try and maintain a “safe” environment (i.e. surveillance cameras, metal detectors). And the green pieces represent the safety and peaceful environment of the students. In the first Jenga set where all of the bottom rows are green (student safety/peace) and all of the upper rows are red (school defense measures), the game is simple and straightforward because participants just take one piece off at a time without any worry about the structure breaking, but the result is that all of the green pieces (student safety/peace) remain stable the entire time. So this structure represents a peaceful school that has addressed other underlying issues that lead to violence, and thus will not break or be instable once/if technical defense mechanisms are removed from the environment. On the contrary, the second Jenga set has all of the pieces intermixed and it is difficult to keep the structure intact because “student safety/peace” is constantly at risk as each mechanism (i.e. surveillance, police, etc.) is taken away. The Jenga structure becomes progressively unstable until it finally topples over, thus showing that these defense mechanisms are not addressing the underlying violence and are just maintaining the perception of “peace” by monitoring, checking, restricting, and ridding violence temporarily and reactively instead of addressing it proactively or through preventative measures.

24 min: Whole Group – Post-Activity Discussion + Reflection – Teachers come back as a whole group and are asked to review their ingredients for a safe/peaceful school checklist and think about which one of those correspond to the green vs. red pieces. Facilitator will need to determine the direction of the conversation to decide whether to be facilitative or more directive in helping teachers come to the realization of the significance of the green and red pieces.

Discussion Questions:

- Why didn't anything happen to the green pieces from table 1's set-up?
- What threatened the stability of peace when the red pieces were removed from table 2's set-up?
 - What are some of those forces and stressors that threaten to topple your school's "peaceful" environment if those mechanisms were removed?
- What are examples of current or proposed defense mechanisms, policies and programs implemented in your school to address violence?
- What kind of violence is most prevalent in your school?
- What are some of the root causes of these violent acts and conflicts?
- What are some alternative policies and programs that could be created to support and sustain a peaceful environment without the use of zero-tolerance policies and technical fixes?
- Could this work in your school? Why? How?

Assessment:

Teachers will research different school programs that support alternative approaches to school discipline, safety and peace, and draft a memo to the school district or administration to highlight and promote the implementation of this program in their school.