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EIRENE
USING COMMUNITY LEARNING
PATHS TO TACKLE BULLYING

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Eirene: Using Community Learning Paths to Tackle Bullying

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Applied Theatre is the use of **drama** practice in an educational, community or therapeutic context. It is often done in non-**theatrical** spaces, with participants who do not consider themselves to be artists.

Theatre can be used as a tool to explore bullying in a **safe and accessible environment**, promoting **awareness, education and advocacy** in a **liberating, interactive and transformative way**.

Bullying is defined as **abusive or hurtful behaviour that occurs repeatedly** and which usually **involves an imbalance of power or strength**. Despite recent focus upon bullying in schools, it remains a major problem and concern for educational facilities, particularly those who educate young people. The horrible reality is a rise in bullying-related suicides and evidence that bullying can have a physical or emotional impact upon a child affecting their sense of **self-worth, their confidence and even their educational and social development**.

Bullying can take on many forms but generally it falls into one or a combination of the following categories:

- ✚ **Physical bullying** - Unprovoked assault on a person or group which can range from a push to serious injury. Physical bullying can include pushing, punching, kicking, tripping, hair-pulling, or even damaging property. Physical bullying can also involve the dangerous or hurtful use of an object or weapon. All the above can cause both short and long term damage to the victim. Physical bullies, particularly in a school setting, are usually bigger, stronger and more aggressive than their victims.

- ✚ **Verbal bullying** - The wilfully pejorative use of language to offend, upset or embarrass. Verbal bullying can take the form of: racial or verbally sexual abuse, homophobic abuse, spreading of rumours, continual name-calling, and use of profanity etc. Perpetrators of verbal bullying tend to use persistent insults to belittle or demean another. Although this type of bullying can take place in school life, there can be long-lasting and damaging effects that endure well into adulthood.
- ✚ **Psychological bullying** – The undermining or reduction of a person’s sense of self-worth or confidence through intimidating behaviour, mocking or derisive insinuations and taunting attacks based upon those aspects mentioned above: race, gender, appearance, personal history etc.
- ✚ **Social bullying** – The exclusion, shunning, or unfounded rejection of a person or group by another peer group. Social bullying can be covert or carried out behind someone’s back, and is often undertaken to harm someone's social or public reputation and is often designed to cause humiliation. Social bullying can include: slander, spreading lies and rumours, subjecting someone to hurtful jokes or humiliating pranks, mocking, and encouraging others to shun someone.
- ✚ **Cyberbullying** - Cyberbullying can be explicit or covert and involve digital technologies such as computers, smartphones, and the internet to deliberately upset, embarrass or humiliate someone else. Cyberbullying usually involves social media, instant messaging, texts, websites and other online platforms. Cyberbullying can include abusive or hurtful social media posts, texts, emails or the uploading of personally offensive images or videos. Cyberbullying can also involve the deliberate shunning or exclusion of someone online, impersonating others online or stealing and using their log in details to misrepresent them, and contacts through technology to intimidate. This type of bullying can feel particularly invasive as it often happens away from school or other physical settings and can occur in the victim’s own home. Due to this aspect in particular, a victim can feel particularly targeted and vulnerable.

Bullying is a violation of *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*:

Bullying of all kinds is, by its nature, a lack of respect towards other people, and an attack upon and a denial of human rights. In the context of 10 to 14-year-old school children this is especially true when considered against *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (entered into force on 2nd September 1990). In the context of this focus upon bullying, key rights as laid out in the Convention, are violated – these include the following:

- ✚ The right to a safe and supportive educational environment free from violence and aggression on both an emotional and physical level.
- ✚ The right to be safeguarded from physical injuries and emotional distress.
- ✚ The right to be safeguarded against actions (verbal or physical) that undermine or compromise a child's self-esteem, dignity, and wellbeing.
- ✚ The right to healthy mental, physical, spiritual, moral, sexual and social development.
- ✚ The right to be treated equally, free from discrimination.
- ✚ The right to access safe and developmentally positive recreation and play.
- ✚ The right to freedom of expression and involvement.
- ✚ The right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.
- ✚ The right to privacy.

[UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in full here.](#)

Article 19 of the Convention is worth attention because it decrees that any person or party: parents / guardian / teacher / school etc.) tasked with caring for a child is duty bound to protect that child.

Use of Applied Theatre to tackle bullying

Applied theatre such as models used in **The Playhouse** can help find the **medicine in stories of suffering, transformation and peace**. Explore the pathway to peace or positive relationships and, engage with real life stories and experiences in accessible, moving, and inspiring workshops. Various models can be used to address issues of social concern.

Story-telling and Playback Theatre is used in a broad range of settings including schools. The model encourages students to tell stories from their own lives and, develop a brief scene and script to reflect their experience in relation to bullying. The students then watch the scenario being played back and, explore ways to create a respectful and safe school environment.

The Spect-actor process requires a **Facilitator**; a neutral party who helps shape and develop the themes and workshop scripts, takes responsibility, ensures fair proceedings and guides conversations; but must never intervene in the content of the live performance. The **participants** observe as **spectators**, a situation of oppression or bullying which must be overcome, before taking the role of '**spect-actors**' becoming involved in re-shaping the script and scenes. Participants focus on solving the problem in as realistic and plausible a way as possible. Although the scenario is been played out in a fictional theatre piece the result should be something like a group '**brainstorm**' about **social problems within the school**.

These models aim to **prevent the isolation of the audience**. Spectators are given capacity for action on stage; this will eliminate any motions of the ruling class portraying ideas to a passive audience. Spectators no longer delegate power to characters to think or act in their place, but free themselves; they think and act for themselves; rehearsing a revolution against bullying!

The Spectator concept represents an approach that uses theatre as means of knowledge and transformation from students' social reality. Techniques are based on transforming the experience of the audience from that of the **spectator into that of the 'spect-actor'** so they too could play an **active role in prefiguring their own reality**. In other words, after a "bullying" scene is played out towards its conclusion, audience members / students are invited to interact with the scene to "avert" or "subvert" what they view as the result of Bullying. They can change and manipulate the scene, considering what actions and interventions might change the scenario and outcomes.