

Non-Violent Resistance to Discrimination

In the English as a Second Language class of Julieta de Zavalía, three successive classes were devoted to Martin Luther King, Jr. and his leadership in the civil rights movement in the U.S. to a group of 15 year old students at Saint Patrick's School in Rosario, Argentina. Students read Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches, the article "Surprising Discoveries About Rosa Parks"¹ and watched a segment of the documentary "Heroes or Villains."²

Ms. Zavalía began by asking students whether they knew Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK). They had heard of him and even mentioned Malcolm X, but they only knew that the two had fought for the rights of the African American people in the US and that they had been killed. So, the class became immersed in listening and reading MLK's speeches, learning new vocabulary and analyzing his messages on equality.

Striking conversations among students took place while watching a segment of "Heroes or Villains" on MLK. Students were impacted a great deal by the terrible injustices that took place only 40 years ago! Reflecting on the prevailing prejudice and negative attitudes and behaviors, students felt ashamed of the behavior of white people who discriminated against black people. They also noted the bias of media coverage during the civil rights movement.

¹ "Surprising Discoveries About Rosa Parks" by Audry Peterson in a magazine called American Legacy: Celebrating African-American History and Culture. (Winter 2001). ISSN: 1086-7201. Web page: www.americanheritage.com/amlegacy (There is no web page in the article itself).

² The video was taken from a series of two videos called "Heroes or Villains." Videos highlight Fidel Castro, Mohandas Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Ho Chi Ming, Mao, Yassir Arafat, Michel Gorbachev. I have worked with all of these videos in peace education classes where students discuss whether individuals are/ were heroes or villains. www.channel4.com/schools

News only covered what was happening in the northern states, but not in the southern states where the movement was strongest. Moreover, nonviolent resistance by blacks toward police forces amazed students. “They would not fight back,” they implored. Pride for individuals who had the courage to stand up for justice and equality was shared among the class.

Through class discussions, students made connections to further examples of discrimination such as discrimination in the lives of Bolivians, Peruvians, Paraguayans, and the Tobas, an indigenous minority group in Argentina. They discussed the detriment of pejorative terms used to segregate people based on the color of their skin i.e., light-skinned, upper class of European descent versus dark-skinned, lower class. In a letter writing exercise, they reflected on their own lives and how they could work against discrimination and for justice (see *Example of the Letter Writing Exercise*).

Teaching culture is a significant part of teaching language. It provides an opportunity to include positive attributes of a society that feed a culture of peace. Using an example from “afar” as in the case of learning a second language/ culture can facilitate the process of making connections “at home.” *Non-Violent Resistance to Discrimination* focuses on racial discrimination in the U.S., laying a foundation to broaden the topic on other forms of discrimination and how it is experienced in other areas as well as to promote respect for different ways of life.

Source: Adapted from Julieta de Zavalía

Saint Patrick's School

Salta 2655

2000 Rosario, Argentina

Email: julietazf@ciudad.co.ar

Age Range: 14 years old and up

Subject: Social Studies, Drama

Materials: Blackboard or large pieces of paper, chalk or marker, videos, recordings, photographs, and/ or written speeches of civil rights or human rights leaders.

Duration: 120 minutes (2 sessions of 60 minutes)

Learning Objectives: Students will:

- Define and discuss the concepts of 'non-violence' and 'discrimination'
- Become acquainted with non-violence as a means of resistance to social injustice
- Make connections from the lesson with discrimination and non-violence in their localities or personal lives

Procedure: Critical Thinking, Inquiry, Balanced Information Gathering, Dialogue, Reflection

Step One: Engage students in a discussion about discrimination by asking questions such as: *How do you define discrimination?* or *What can you tell me about discrimination?*

Step Two: Building on the responses from the previous inquiry, ask students to share their thoughts about the roots and effects of discrimination.

Step Three: To close out the discussion, elicit answers from the class on different ways they or others might resist discrimination (past/ present), and record their answers on a board or large sheet of paper.

Next, on an additional sheet of paper with separate headings for “Violent” and “Non-violent,” ask students to categorize their responses under the appropriate heading.

Step Four: Introduce the video, recording or speech of a civil rights or human rights leader who nonviolently fought against discrimination. As an optional warm up, ask students, *judging by the title or synopsis of this video, what might you expect to see?*

Instruct students to look for as many examples as possible of the following list while viewing the video (they might want to have a pencil and paper ready to take brief notes):

- Forms and incidences of discrimination
- Forms of resistance to discrimination
- Incidences of violent and/or non-violent action
- Observations on language, tone of voice and body gestures used by people

- Questions they might have about the film

Step Five: As a class, ask students to share their observations about the video, speech, or recording. Write students' observations on the board or large piece of paper at the front of the class.

Step Six: Divide students into small groups of 3-5, and have each group develop a scenario of discrimination to be acted out as a skit. Scenarios should have 2 possible conclusions: one negative and one positive. Explain the rest of the exercise to prepare students.

Note: Encourage students to create scenarios about different forms of discrimination such as discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc. Teachers can help ensure scenarios cover different forms of discrimination by writing these differences on pieces of paper and having each group select one of the pieces of paper. (This is optional since scenarios should be generated from the knowledge of the students and it is important that students demonstrate familiarity with different forms of discrimination). Ask them to pay attention to their use of language, tone of voice and body gestures and how each of these plays a role in expressing their intent.

Step Seven: Students act out their skits. At the height of conflict (before any conclusion is reached), students acting out the skit, say "pause." A "pause" invites the entire class to create possible conclusions to the scenario. Encourage students to think of as many

options or alternatives as possible. After the class shares their ideas, students act out the skit to complete the scenario as they originally intended. Finally, ask students: *How do the two different outcomes make you feel? Can you compare the degree of harm and the degree of good caused by each outcome? How does this exercise help you make future decisions?*

Another variation can be employed with student skits: 1) students acting out the scenario can act out each possible conclusion as it is proposed by the class or 2) the class can vote on one of the different possibilities proposed by the class for the students to act out.

Step Eight: Ask students to reflect on both the violence of discrimination and nonviolent alternatives to discrimination in a diary or journal. Provide students with the option of reflecting on either a personal experience of discrimination or to reflect on the lesson/class activity and what they have taken from it.

Connection: See *Empowering Women* in Strand Two on International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law and Institutions.

Evaluation: Below is an *Example of the Letter Writing Exercise* which is a letter to Martin Luther King, Jr. written by Delfina Semino, age 15, of Ms. Zavalía's class. Brackets indicate corrections in spelling and grammar of the English language.

Dear Martin Luther King, Jr.,

My name is Delfina Semino. I live in Argentina, America. I'm writing to tell you about how I feel about your father's actions.

Yesterday, my English teacher made my class watch a movie about your father. It really moved me. It's incredible how a single person can give hope to a [whole] nation of Afro-Americans when he turned borrowed times into better [lives]. It shocked me how he could outlaw all kind of racist laws, like when black people couldn't vote. It's amazing how he started being a preacher and turned up being as important as his idol, Gandhi. The part of the movie I liked most was when he defeated the stronghold of racism. It was terrible how they were segregated and treated in that city. Besides, at that time, the government [tried] to cover [up] the situation. I know that because one of my teachers was living near that city and never heard a word about your father.

You may think he only changed colored people's [lives]. That's not true. He also changed white people's [lives] like [mine]. Yesterday at night, I couldn't sleep thinking of the idea that, if racism hadn't been stopped, I would be a racist. For example, [during] that [time], white people were [reared] to dislike and demean Afro-Americans. If that hadn't changed, I would have been raised the same way. So, I'm really thankful.

He touched my soul so deeply that now, I'm trying to abolish racism in another way. Here in Argentina, we usually call poor and bad people "Negro". I think that's horrible. That offends colored people. I know I won't change the world, but I would like to change a bad habit.

Lots of Love and Respect,

Delfina Semino

Congratulations, Delfi. I was moved by your thoughts and impressed with your language. I'm very proud of you. - Miss Julieta