

# CHESION

*citizenship education  
on social inclusion*

## IMIND

Classroom activities for early adolescents  
strengthening soft skills in the areas of  
attentional control, identity, perspective  
taking and conflict resolution



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## COLOPHON

*Cohesion: **IMIND**, (Identity, Mindfulness, Inclusion, Nurture and Development)*

*Classroom Activities for Early adolescents strengthening soft skills in the areas of attentional control, identity, perspective taking and conflict resolution*

*This modular lesson material for primary schools offers six in-class exercises with a focus on Mindfulness, Identity and roles and Perspective taking and conflict resolution. The material offers step-by-step instructions of the exercises and a brief section of background information on the topic. The exercises are easy to implement, educative and fun!*

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## INTRODUCTION PRIMARY SCHOOL MATERIAL

Radicalization is becoming more and more of a problem in European countries, with the roots of extremism often planted at a very young age. Schools can play a vital role in the prevention of radicalization, as it provides an environment where resilience and critical thinking can be fostered. UCARE curriculum offers an initiative to “break the cycle of radicalization by its core” (Terra Toolkit, p. 3) by providing educational

tools aimed at fostering social-emotional skills in students of secondary schools. Fostering these qualities will lead them to be more prosocial, altruistic and able to deal with difficult situations. In similar vein, this document provides exercises for early adolescents in final classes of primary school age and is designed to fit in any classroom, regardless of the country or region.



# MINDFULNESS AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Research into the effectiveness of mindfulness for children and adolescents is increasing and more and more evidence of successful interventions in school environments is gathered. Exposing children to mindfulness early has several beneficial effects as described below. After a general overview of mindfulness and its different interventions, a practical guide of how to directly apply mindfulness exercises in the classroom is presented.

## BACKGROUND

It has been shown that mindfulness-based training positively influences the cognitive abilities of children, including qualities such as attention, self-regulation, creativity and problem-solving skills (Zenner et al., 2014) which in turn have positive effects on academic achievement (Beauchemin et al., 2008; Sibinga et al., 2011).

In fact, mindfulness training stimulates exactly the growth and better functioning of brain areas related to attentional control (Tang et al., 2015). The resulting increases in meta-awareness and attentional control are often underlying the positive effects on academic performance and lessen difficulties such as attention

deficit hyperactivity disorder (Van der Oord et al., 2012).

Furthermore, mindfulness interventions at school reduce emotional risk factors such as depression and anxiety (Liehr & Diaz, 2010), including social anxiety (Kashdan & Breen, 2009) and test anxiety (Napoli et al., 2005), while increasing psychological coping abilities, resilience (Zenner et al., 2014), subjective happiness and mindful awareness (Bögels et al., 2008).

Several studies showed that mindfulness also increases self-esteem (Rempel, 2012; Wisner et al., 2010) and optimism (Schonert-Reichl & Lawlor, 2010) in students participating in school mindfulness programs. Here, especially the focus on self-compassion shows a great influence on the well-being of the children (Marshall et al., 2015). Instead of attacking and berating themselves for not being “good enough”, or brooding on a shortcoming, the children learn to unconditionally accept themselves and the ability to sooth and comfort themselves in stressful life-circumstances (Neff & Germer, 2013).



Related to this, research shows that mindfulness training helps in preventing negative conduct in schools, as students become more mindful of their aggressive behaviour (Singh et al., 2007). Likewise, it increases prosocial dispositions such as compassion, empathy and ethical sensitivity (Zenner et al., 2014).

To conclude, it is not surprising that a recent review on mindfulness interventions in schools has summarized the effects of mindfulness interventions at schools as followed: “Mindfulness practice enhances the very qualities and goals of education in the 21st century [...] and enables children to deal with future challenges of the rapidly changing world” (Zenner et al., 2014, p. 2).

## MINDFULNESS

### Main elements of the mindfulness training

The key elements of mindfulness are awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of one's moment-to-moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1990), which allows an enhanced *recognition* of what is present in the moment. This may involve the physical sensation of the breath, but can also include awareness of psychological distress such as rumination, anxiety or anger, and the recognition of maladaptive tendencies, of avoiding, suppressing, or over-engaging with

distressing thoughts and emotions (Hayes et al., 2004). The children learn to acknowledge what really is present in the moment and foster the ability to stay with it. The emotional reactivity decreases and they can adopt a more compassionate and accepting approach.

### Techniques

The specific techniques practiced in mindfulness include awareness exercises such as sitting meditations, the bodyscan, and movement practices such as adapted yoga. The children learn to concentrate on a well-defined object such as their breathing, with as little as possible distraction from internal (e.g., thoughts) or external (e.g., sounds) sources. At the same time, qualities such as acceptance and compassion are fostered. Due to the continuous practice of these skills, meditation is associated with increased attentional control and acceptance, while automatic mind-wandering and negative affect decreases (Rahl et al., 2017).

### Different types of mindfulness training

The remarkably successful Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) training was founded by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979 (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). The traditional MBSR is taught in an 8-week workshop with weekly 2,5 hour meetings.



The format is a group setting in which sharing is promoted and mindfulness-based exercises and skills are trained and consolidated in the form of daily homework. Since then, the original MBSR format has been adapted for several specialized groups. Examples are integrating elements of cognitive behavioural therapy to address the specific needs of patients with depression in the “Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy” (MBCT; Segal et al., 2002), or adapting the length and content of the course for children (Black et al., 2009; Burke et al., 2009), parent (e.g., Bögels & Restifo, 2013) or business programs (e.g., Carroll, 2008). Even major companies, like Google and Apple, and national governments use modified versions of the MBSR, or their own mindfulness programs, for employees and leadership development.

Especially within the school setting, multiple mindfulness programs have been developed to help educators to integrate it in their own schools. Examples of programs available in the Netherlands are “Mindful Kids” for kids (<https://www.mindfulkids.nl>). In the UK programs are “Paws .B” for Kids and “.B” for adolescents (<https://mindfulnessinschools.org>). These (paid) programs are especially designed to teach educators how to implement mindfulness in a class setting by becoming mindfulness

trainers themselves within the school setting. Similar to the original MBSR format both, the Mindful Kids or .B program, consist of eight weekly meetings in which the children practice different mindfulness exercises and deepen their knowledge. During the teacher training course participants first experience mindfulness for themselves and then learn how to lead the exercises. To help teaching the structured 8-week course additional materials, for example power points, are provided.














## ACTIVITY 1: THE BODYSCAN

This is an easy implementable exercise which does not need any additional equipment. The first time this exercise is implemented, it is beneficial to devote a good part of a full 45 minute school-hour to it. By devoting extra time before and after the actual exercise for introduction, inquiry and discussion of the exercise the learning experience for the children increases and the impact of this exercise is enhanced. In order to incorporate this exercise into a regular (weekly or even daily) practice, for example as a little break in between or at the start of the day, the timings later can be adjusted to fit the time possibilities (more on this in the section 'Alternative ways in which you can conduct the activity').

### Aims of the activity:

-  To teach the children how to self-observe, be in contact with their own body and feel present in the moment.
-  To teach the children how to stay focused on a certain topic, how to concentrate for a longer time and how to notice that their mind is wandering off, and how to deal with distraction.
-  To teach the children self-regulation and that it is possible to bring their attention back in a soft and compassionate way.

-  To teach the children self-regulation.
-  To teach the children to experience their body as safe.
-  To teach the children that it is possible to return to their body in times of stress.
-  To let the children getting used to being still together in class, to have a sense of being in contact with oneself and togetherness at the same time.
-  To let the children notice how they affect each other (group behaviour: being still, not disturb).
-  To increase the bond and trust between the teacher and children.

### Description:

**Length:** Preparation and explanation: ca. 10 minutes. Bodyscan: ca. 10 minutes (+5 minutes; reserve some extra time for transition before and after the exercise). Inquiry and discussion: ca. 15 minutes.

**Preparation:** This exercise can be done while the children are sitting on their chairs. It might be nice to create a circle to make a different setting from the 'normal' class situation and to increase a sense of 'doing this together'. If it is more convenient for logistic or time reasons, it is also possible to do this exercise while the children are on their regular place in the classroom. Just



let them create a little distance between themselves and their desk so that they can sit freely without touching anything or anyone.

**Materials:** None. Only in the variation in which participants lay down they need mats or blankets.

#### **Preparation & explanation:**

Explain how the bodyscan exercise will be done (see steps below) and that the purpose is for the children to take the time to make contact with themselves. To minimize possible apprehension or anxiety about the new exercise, create a feeling of calmness, softness and safety to allow children to trust and go along with the instructions. Furthermore, teacher can make the exercise more fun or alive for the children by adding a flavour of 'play', for example by saying that they are like "explorers who go on a journey to discover all that they can feel. And that their task is to not let anything (no sensation, thought, etc.) escape their amazing superpower which we call focus/attention". Also explain the reason why their eyes are closed during the exercise: it is to help the focus. It helps to stay with what they feel instead of being distracted by looking at what is happening around them. Here the issue of safety is important to mention again: Please add that in case it does not feel good for someone to keep the eyes closed, they







can always choose to have them a bit open. But then it is important that they try to look to only one place (e.g., a bit ahead or down) and do not look around in the classroom. Ensure the children that there is no 'wrong' or 'right' way of feeling. Whatever they feel is ok. Even in case they may not feel anything or if they have difficulty staying with the sensation. It is their openness, trust and intention that counts. It can also help to already say that there may be distractions (thoughts, sounds) and that that is also ok. When they notice it, they can bring their attention back to the body part where they are at the moment, in a calm accepting way. Also explain that at no point in the exercise students are meant to open their eyes solely for the purpose of looking at the others. In this exercise everyone keeps their focus only on themselves. Also, in order to be able to really feel they need to be quiet. So, it is very important to be silent for themselves as well as for the others, to not disturb each other. This means no talking or laughing and also trying to avoid any other noises, like moving with the chair, during the exercise. Finally, allow ample time for questions before starting. This might be a new situation for the children so encourage an open, honest exchange before the exercise and allow them to voice possible concerns or if anything is unclear. This prevents the children from begin occupied




with something they worry about, while having to be silent for some time.

### Instruction

For an easier application, first, the general steps are outlined and afterwards a script is presented.

-  Let the children sit relaxed and comfortably on their chair, with their hands resting on their lap.
-  Let them close their eyes and focus inwards.
-  Direct their attention to their breathing. Start with taking a few big breaths (ca. 5).
-  Then, direct attention to different parts of the body in this order:
  - Feet
  - Legs
  - Back
  - Stomach
  - Shoulders
  - Arms
  - Hands
  - Head and face
  - Breathing through the whole body
-  Slowly bring the children back (small movements).
-  Tell the children that they can open their eyes.

 Inquiry of experiences.

### Script:

You can read this script or use your personal style of wording. Present the bodyscan in a calm, slow voice and allow time between each step for the children to experience. "We will now start with the exercise. See if you have found a comfortable position on your chair or if you still need to change something. Feel free to move until you are comfortable.

Then you can close your eyes. Remember as we discussed in the beginning that this can help you to focus more on yourself. In case you don't like it, you can also keep your eye a little bit open... The moment we all close our eyes, we also all close our mouths. We still know that everyone is there. But now is the time you can really focus on yourself. Starting the journey through your own body. Like an adventurer that is discovering all new places.

Now we start by feeling what is happening when you take a big breath in. Gentle, large breaths. Pay attention to how that feels... Where do you feel the breathing?... Maybe at your nose, or maybe even deeper... Follow the breath all the way into your belly. To the deepest point of your breathing... Observe what is happening as you keep on breathing: your belly rises and falls... Air moves in and out of your body. If you like, place a hand on your belly and feel it move with each breath: when you



breathe in your hand moves up... and when you breath out your hand goes back...”

[Now you can guide their awareness through the different body parts. Starting from the feet slowly towards the head.]

Example for investigating the feet:

“And now, take a deeper breath in and imagine how your awareness is following the breathing all the way from the nose to the belly, and then all the way towards your feet... Make contact with your feet... How are your feet today?... Can you feel them on the ground?... What are they touching? Maybe your socks or shoes... How do your feet feel right now?...” [Continue in this way through the different parts of the body until you reach the head.]

[Ending the exercise] “Now that we have given attention, and awareness, to each part of your body, see if you can feel yourself sitting here, right now, on the chair. Can you feel your entire body?... All the places that you have given your attention to?... The head,... shoulders,... arms... and hands,... front of your body... and the back ..., all the way to the feet... If you like, you can also imagine that you can breathe through your body: when you breathe in, fill your body all the way from the head to the toes. And when you breathe out, come up again from the toes to the head... Try this a few times if you like [pause]... And now sit a bit while feeling your body. Slowly breathing and feeling your whole body... [pause].

And now you can take a deeper breath in and slowly start moving by wiggling your toes and your fingers... Now you can move a bit more, maybe stretch, maybe yawn... Do what feels really good right now... Slowly prepare yourself to come out of the exercise [pause]. And now, when you’re ready, slowly open your eyes. Notice how it is to see again. And notice how your body feels now after the exercise... Try to stay with yourself a little bit longer before we start talking.

#### **Inquiry:**

Give the children some time to slowly come back. To get used to the light and to being back in the room again. Maybe there even is still a little moment of silent before the talking starts again. It is very beneficial to add an inquiry after the exercise. It helps to make the children more aware of what happened, solidifies the experience and gives the opportunity to add or deepen their understanding and learning. The focus is first on the experience itself, then it can be helpful to add insights or tips.

Try to acknowledge their experience and repeat that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to feel. Some might feel a lot, some less. Some were focused, others distracted. In mindfulness we teach children to observe the experience without instantly labelling them as better or worse.

Example questions to ask



- 🌈 How does your body feel now?
- 🌈 What did you feel during the exercise?
- 🌈 Does it feel different or the same compared to the beginning or during the exercise?
- 🌈 Did you notice differences between body parts? Were some places tense, or relaxed, or ticklish or something else?
- 🌈 What happened with your mind? Did you notice distractions, thoughts, impatience...?
- 🌈 How did you react towards these distractions?
- 🌈 What else did you learn/observe?

#### Take home message/discussion:

- 🌈 The children learn to express their own sensations, emotions and mental states openly. This honest sharing with each other and curiosity are encouraged.
- 🌈 The children can learn that mental states change (i.e., one moment I can be concentrated, the next bored, the next lost in a thought, and then I can be back in the body). This includes body sensations but also thoughts and emotions. One implication of this is that when they feel anxious or nervous, they know that it also leaves again at some point,

and that there is a way to come back to the body and relieve or relax again.

- 🌈 Hearing that others might have similar experiences. "I'm not the only one that experiences this..."
- 🌈 They learn that it is possible to practice this exercise more often, so they have more opportunities to learn. And maybe even at some point can do it by themselves.

#### Alternative ways to conduct the activity:

As described before, this exercise can also be done with the children laying down on mats if the space permits. Laying down adds to the relaxing response and might make it easier for some children to relax.

It is advisable to adapt the length according to time allowances. It can for example be used at the beginning of a regular class in the form of a 5 minutes exercise. It is however advisable that the children first had the entire exercise as described above (including introduction and inquiry) so that they are familiar with it. Even reducing this to a 3 minutes breathing exercise can have a big effect, especially if practiced regularly.

At some days this exercise can be given with a primary focus on the breathing. Here the hands







on the belly can assist in feeling the movements  
of the belly during the in- and exhaling.



## ACTIVITY 2: GRATEFULNESS MOMENT

Mindfulness exercises do not always have to be long and practiced in a formal way. It becomes also alive when it is integrated and deeply rooted in our daily life. Therefore, the second mindful activity presented here is a short practice which can be integrated in the daily routine.

### Aims of the activity:

-  To increase well-being and positive emotions.
-  To let the children get used to, notice little moments for which they can be happy and grateful.
-  To allow the children to express what they noticed and learn to formulate inner states and what is important for them.
-  To increase awareness for the little things we routinely dismiss or are used to.






### Description:

**Length:** Approximately 10 minutes, although, this exercise does not need to have a specific time frame. It can be a very small inquiry and collection of experiences, or if time permits a longer session in which to talk a bit more about it.

**Preparation:** This exercise can be done while the children are sitting on their chairs. It might be nice to create a circle to make a different setting from the 'normal' class situation and to increase a sense of 'doing this together'

**Materials:** none

### Instruction

-  This exercise is a great way to start or end a class. It is initiated by asking the children to express one thing (big or small) that they felt grateful for today or yesterday.
-  The first time you introduce this exercise you might start with a few examples, such as "Today I was grateful for my friend that helped me", or "Today I was grateful for my mum giving me a biiiig hug" ...
-  First give the children a few moments to think about a situation and encourage the children to really go back to the moment. To really see it and to feel it again. Allow this to last until everyone has picked their moment.
-  You can start by saying something that you were grateful for today: "Today I was grateful for....".
-  Then, one after the other the children can say the sentence "Today I was



grateful for....”. The others listen carefully and see if they can feel it too.

- 🌈 When everybody had their turn, guide the children into a little moment of silence to appreciate and to feel the sense of gratefulness.
- 🌈 By introducing this exercise as a routine (for example at the beginning or the end of the week or even the day), it does not take a lot of time but can have a big impact on the class.

#### **Alternative ways to conduct the activity:**

Depending on time constrictions the time spend with each experience can vary greatly. Further variations be practiced for example: Sharing “something that made you happy today”, or “something good I did today/yesterday”. Acknowledging and highlighting positive experiences and behaviour can have an uplifting effect on the class.





## IDENTITY AND ROLES AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Identity refers to our sense of self, and it is constructed in a process that involves several psychological and social facets. In the process of searching for the sense of self during adolescence, “who am I?”, one’s identity is formed by relating oneself to roles and social classifications, and by categorizing and evaluating oneself in a reflexive manner (Stets & Burke, 2000). Identity contains the ideals, values and beliefs which a person holds, and together they shape and help guide our actions and behaviour (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

The development of one’s identity stands central during adolescence, corresponding to the fifth stage of Erikson’s well-known model for psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968). According to this model, the crisis which adolescents must overcome is that of identity and role confusion. In this stage, the exploration of independence and the search for the self are key processes, and during this phase adolescents will learn the role they will have as an adult. Going through this phase of the psychosocial development is necessary for the successful transition from childhood to adulthood. If one fails in this process, no strong sense of identity within the society will be developed, but there

will be role confusion instead (Block M., 2011). This leaves an individual with a weak sense of self and unsure of where to fit into society (Erikson, 1968).

Successfully constructing a positive identity can play an important role in the promotion of tolerance, community cohesion and active citizenship. Moreover, a strong sense of identity could serve as a possible inoculation against radical narratives of extremist groups, as these often target their narratives to minors with identity struggles and personal uncertainty (Cohen et al., 2019; Doosje, Loseman & Van Den Bos, 2013). Fortunately, there is a growing recognition that the construction of identity has to become a significant focus in education (Flum & Kaplan, 2012). Educational methods can contribute to the successful formation of a positive identity. When activities aiming to strengthen the formation process of identity are part of education, adolescents will be able to gain agency and skills needed to successfully function and fit into contemporary society. Additionally, it can provide them with motivation and experience, which will not only benefit their personal development, but will also upskill adolescents, enabling them to



learn how to interact in a way to positively influence their community (Flum & Kaplan, 2006).

## BACKGROUND

Personal awareness and self-knowledge of one's culture, heritage and race is in many ways important for the successful development of identity. Research into the knowledge that adolescents have about their family history, showed that knowing more about one's familial past is not only related to higher levels of identity achievement but also to more general emotional well-being (Fivush, Duke & Bohanek, 2010). It was also suggested that "one's family narrative may actually play a more active role in the formation of adolescent identity" and that "knowledge of one's place in an extended family narrative can contribute to the reduction of role confusion" (Fivush, Duke & Bohanek, 2010, p.

7). For example, by talking about the challenges parents faced in their teen years, the adolescent can learn how to face similar challenges when encountered, and to cope with the stress and demands of teen years.

But not only attaining this form of self-knowledge is important, sharing it as well. Encouraging children to share stories about their backgrounds could help them to positively accept their cultural and ethnic identities. Through this activity, children will be able to see how all individuals are different, yet very similar. Additionally, they will learn to better respect others. At the same time, achieving this can make the classroom a less hostile or unfriendly place for those who might still be insecure in their identity, and enhance their engagement and performance in class (Gay, 1979).






## ACTIVITY 1: YOU'RE A SUPERHERO

Around the age of eight years, children start tying their interests directly to their sense of self and their identity (Alexander, Johnson & Leibham, 2015, p. 272). Nowadays, children learn from a multitude of different sources around them, that frequently are presented to them on a technological format. Social media is, in this century, a large part of children's life and this is likely to only increase in the future. Due to children being surrounded by these mediums, their interests are tied to them; from influencers and vloggers to media shown on YouTube and Instagram. Therefore, it is appropriate to incorporate these elements of the pop culture in the lesson plan and exercises, as this will allow to keep the students interested and engaged.

These media outlets stimulate, among other things, the visual senses of the children. The visual language is an important part of a child's development and should not be left out of this class plan (Unrath & Luehrman, 2009, p. 42). The impact that the interests of children have on their perception of self, can be perfectly integrated in a visual exercise. The influence of interests of children on their identity can be seen in the example given by Alexander and colleagues (2015), where they describe a situation of a child that reads a book about dinosaurs: an

interest in dinosaurs leads the child to understand the book, and this leads the child to think "I might be a scientist" (Alexander et al., 2015, p. 266). Letting the child run their imagination freely and exploring their own interests, can let them develop a positive view of themselves and others. The linking network (2019) made a class exercise that lets children explore their identity through a visual medium. They designed a class exercise where the pupils can draw their own coats of arms, based on what they think are the most important and central parts of their identity. To make it more contemporary, instead of a coat of arms, the children could design their own superhero logo, a better fit with pop culture.

### Aims of activity:

-  To encourage the pupils to explore their own identity and sense of self.
-  To create an exercise that uses visual language to learn about identity and roles.
-  To interact with the different elements of their identities in a positive and creative way.

### Description:

**Length:** Approximately 20-30 minutes.

**Preparation:** During this exercise, it is important to create and maintain a positive atmosphere,



non-hostile and calm, that allows the students to feel comfortable.

At the end, students can show their logo if they want to and add an explanation to it, but this is not mandatory. It is important to support and encourage students that seem shy to embrace their identity, and for them to be comfortable.

**Materials:** Sheets of paper, markers and pens (or paint and brushes).

### Instruction

The activity starts by explaining that everybody has a unique identity, and that everybody has different roles in different situations.

Elaborate on the fact that even though some people might take a certain role in a certain situation, this does not mean that they changed their identity completely.

Also, emphasize that even though everyone has a unique identity, identities consist of different elements, such as social groups, interests, etc. Point out different elements of each identity that students have in common, and that there are also elements that they differ in.

Then, lead the conversation to how heroes take on a role but also have a core identity, explaining how their logo can represent that identity.

Take out paper, markers and coloured pencils, and explain the exercise: Students will design their own superhero logo that represents their identity.

Optional: The instructor can also show some examples and also an example of their own logo they designed.

### Alternative ways to conduct the activity:

This activity can also be done with painting a logo, instead of drawing one with pencils and markers.

Instead of making a superhero logo, students can make a list of their own 'ingredients' (Levine, 2013), indicating what they think are important aspects of their identity.



## ACTIVITY 2: CLASS IDENTITY



As the first activity is centred on the individual identities of the pupils, the second exercise will focus on the social identity and unity of the class as a whole. It will encompass the social identity of pupils and give them a sense of belonging in the class. It is important to highlight each individual's identity while also incorporating them in the social identity of the class to create inclusivity.

In this activity, all pupils will collect elements that remind them of the shared experience with the class and will bring them together to form a symbol of class identity. These elements can be, for example, a picture of the class or a book that the teacher read to the class for weeks during the snack break, etc. It can also include some items related to the first exercise, where the students shared their own identities with the class. Including those items can make the children really feel part of the class. Overarching environmental factors such as the shared culture they grow up in can also be included. For example, a movie such as Frozen might have had an important and meaningful impact on the class, as they might have discussed it with the class or maybe even went to see it as an excursion (Hewes, Whitty, Aamot, Schaly, Sibbald & Ursuliak, 2016). All elements, objects and

memories should be assembled to form an image of the class's identity. For example, it could be made into a collage poster hanging in the classroom or album they all get a copy of.

An interesting version of this exercise involves creating a time capsule, which can be opened again after a while (The linking network, 2019). Other forms of this exercise are also possible (see also 'alternative ways to conduct the activity'), as long as all pupils create a symbol of common identity while also being able to put a personal touch on it. Ultimately the goal is to let the class decide on what they think their group identity is based on and what is important to be included. In this way, the class can have a positive experience working together with a focus on unity and their social group.

### Aims of activity:

-  To focus on the social identity of the class.
-  To create a sense of unity in the class.

### Description:

**Length:** Approximately 1 class hour.

**Preparation:** Ensure that there is a space in the home classroom where a poster can be placed and remain for a long time. Think of good examples of meaningful shared experiences. And prepare a clear explanation of the task for children.



**Materials:** Items that can reflect class identity, paper and pen to write messages, and in case of a time capsule: a box

### Instruction

The activity starts with the explanation that we also have a social identity, and that being part of a group can be a significant part of who we are. Describe what it can mean to be part of a group and how it is important to support each other in a setting such as a classroom. Focus on the class as a group; if this is successful, it can create unity.




Then, introduce the poster and explain its purpose: It will represent what all the members of the class share together, as well as showing what makes this class special and unique. The instructor may clarify the activity by means of an example of what can be included on the poster, such as a picture of the class, and then put picture on the poster as the first element. Then, encourage and allow that the children discuss what events, values, roles they share and make them feel togetherness. Give them enough time to create their own ideas (It can be homework). The students will share their ideas in a conversation and using 'post it' they can be displayed on the board. Let the students discuss it with each other and consider what photos or

images would better represent these ideas (They can take pictures or make drawings representing these elements. Encourage that every student put at least one object or message on it).

After that, students will assemble a collage poster. The poster should have signatures of all students. Let all children sign it or put a personal stamp on it, so they all feel they belong to the common symbol.


### Alternative ways to conduct the activity:

Instead of a collage poster the children can also make an artistic symbol of class identity, a book or a time capsule (The linking network, 2019). In case of choosing to create a time capsule, it is important to consider the following:

-  The concept has to be explained to the students and what kind of things they can put in the box.
-  As children will collect physical items to put in the time capsule (box), it is recommended to make sure that they do not use very valuable or perishable items.
-  It is important to clarify and specify which time span the time capsule will have, in the sense of when the students will be allowed to open it up again (This can be at the end of the school year or



at the end of middle school, for example).

 Make sure to put the time capsule somewhere safe, so that nobody can

take items out before the time capsule is supposed to be opened (stipulated date) by the whole class again.



# PERSPECTIVE TAKING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

## BACKGROUND

Perspective taking refers to the ability to assume someone else's perspective, allowing an individual to infer the thoughts, emotions and behaviour of others, which provides them with a sense of the world around them (Carpendale & Lewis, 2006; Moll & Meltzoff, 2011; Sullivan, Bennett, Carpenter & Lewis, 2008).

Perspective taking can be seen as a multi-componential construct, and the three components include: cognitive, visual and affective perspective taking (Fireman & Kose, 2010; Cigala, Mori & Fangareggi, 2015). Cognitive perspective taking allows an individual to infer someone else's thoughts, intentions and motivations (Eisenberg, Zhou & Koller, 2001), visual perspective taking allows an individual to infer how one object is seen from different viewpoints in space (Moll & Meltzoff, 2011; Moll & Tomasello, 2006) and affective perspective taking is the foundation of empathy as it refers to the ability to understand someone else's emotional states (Fireman & Kose, 2010; Harwood & Farrar, 2006). Affective, or emotional, perspective

taking is essential as it is the foundation of empathy.

Multiple studies demonstrate a positive role of affective perspective taking abilities in conflict resolution (Gehlbach, Brinkworth & Wang, 2012; Corcoran & Mallinckrodt, 2011; Domitrovich, Durlak, Staley & Weissberg, 2017). Conflict is the "perceived incompatible objectives between two or more people or groups" (Bickmore, 1997, p. 4) and conflict resolution is the process of reconciling the opposing groups in favor of peace-building (Abdulsalam, Bada & Adam, 2015). In conflict situations, the improvement of social-emotional skills results in less aggression (Jones, 2004) and more negotiation. The development of these skills leads students to suffer from less mental health complications as well as make it less likely that they will engage in aggressive behaviors (Walker, 2004; Zins & Elias, 2007).

In the multi-cultural classroom of the current days, social perspective taking and conflict resolution become even more important skills to nourish (Gehlbach, 2017), as a variety of diverse





students are highly aware of their own perspectives, but struggling to put themselves ‘in someone else’s shoes’ may lead to a conflict-stressed classroom where students are not able to learn with and from each other (Ioannou & Constantinou, 2018). Moreover, the recent increase in conflicts has not only “affected and weakened peaceful coexistence and mutual cohabitation today, it has done that along ethnic and religious divides and has engendered a break in the socio-political system as well” (Abdulsalam et al., 2015, p. 2). Now, more than ever, perspective taking abilities and conflict resolution skills are needed to teach children (in multi-cultural environments) to live peacefully next to each other.

School is not only a place where conflict resolution skills and perspective taking skills are needed but also a place where children can develop them. Nowadays, schools are expected to contribute more and more to the development of a child’s emotional and social competences (Denham, Hatfield, Smethurst, Tan & Tribe, 2006). One of the ways to nurture this development is through the creation of a safe school environment, as school climate and student behaviour are shown to be strongly related (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jones, 2004). Researchers have found evidence that a school climate that is nurturing has positive effects on

problem-solving skills, conflict resolution abilities and prosocial behaviors (e.g., building friendships and respecting each other; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2013). In the creation of a nurturing school climate and fostering of emotional skills, the teacher plays an important role (Moore, in press). Regarding conflict management behaviour, children are found to follow the teacher’s directions about conflict management nine out of ten times (Spivak, 2016) and the involvement of the teacher in conflict resolution gives children the possibility to learn conflict resolution strategies, as the teacher becomes a role model in the social learning of conflict-resolution behaviors (Church, Mashford-Scott & Cohnsen, 2018).

Conflict resolution skills and perspective taking skills also can be fostered, through the use of exercises in which these behaviors are explicitly and deliberately practiced. Such exercises can fast-track the natural development of these skills among children. For instance, instructing people to imagine themselves as the other person, is considered to be a successful method of increasing perspective taking abilities (Myers, Laurent & Hodges, 2014).

In recent studies, an array of active methods are shown to be effective in generating perspective



taking abilities in school-children, such as the 'I Can Problem Solve Program' (Aras & Aslan, 2018), collaborative activities using picture books (An, Lee & Kwon, 2019) and the use of interactive tabletops (Ioannou & Constantinou, 2018). The training program I Can Problem Solve is aimed at the acquisition of interpersonal problem-solving skills through a cognitive approach. The researchers explain its effectiveness in fostering perspective taking skills to be a result of the children's abilities to see the same object from different perspectives. Activities aim to help the children to understand what they and other individuals feel, to recognize emotions and to understand that different individuals might have different emotions. In this program, children become familiar with emotions and feelings of other individuals through experiences such as sharing, waiting for their turn, co-operation, etc. as problem-solving strategies (Aras & Aslan, 2018). In such programs (Sklad & Park, 2016; Aras & Aslan, 2018) through the use of visual perspective taking skills in the activities, children are able to understand how the same things can be seen from different perspectives, first with real-life objects and then with more abstract concepts. This allows their social perspective taking skills to strengthen with all the positive effects that come with that. There are also examples of


effective interventions focused on practicing conflict-management skills. For example, the Lion Quest Program is found to have a positive effect on school climate, students' behaviour and conflict resolution skills (Gol-Guven, 2017).








## ACTIVITY 1: COLOURFUL PYRAMIDS

It is good to start with a hands-on, practical form of perspective taking. Visual perspective taking, the ability to understand that others may see something differently than yourself (Moll & Meltzoff, 2011), is a good starting point. In this exercise, some children will see a pyramid from different perspectives, all seeing the pyramid in a different colour. By discussing what they see, the children realize that their perspective may differ from someone else's. Many different geometrical shapes can be used to teach children that different perspectives in space lead to different perspectives of the object. By making sure that all sides of the shape look differently in some way (e.g., colour, symbol, etc.), the children can experience the effect of different perspectives, while also beginning to understand that one perspective is not inherently better or more truthful than the other, as they are all valid dependent on the position of the observer. In this way, it will also help the children to develop empathy and prosocial behaviour (Farrant, Devine, Maybery & Fletcher, 2012).

### Aims of the activity:

-  To actively engage in perspective taking.

-  Showing the differences between a narrow-minded worldview and an open-minded worldview.
-  To improve perspective taking skills.
-  To decrease discrimination of otherness.
-  To put oneself in another person's perspective and, as a result, increase empathy.
-  To understand that other perspectives are as valid as your own.

### Description:

**Length:** Approximately 20 minutes.

**Preparation:** If possible, the observers should be seated in a table-circle formation around the empty space where the volunteers sit around the pyramid. This will allow the observers to also partake in the exercise by having a certain perspective. The discussion as well as the activity itself are aimed at literally putting yourself in someone else's place and the results of that. The sides of the pyramid need to be different colours, so make sure to either make it out of different coloured papers or to use coloured pens in order to do so.



**Materials:** Open space and a ready-made pyramid (for instructions and template, see Appendix I)




### Instruction




Ask four students to volunteer and have them sit in a square formation on the ground. Tell the other students that they are observers and that they need to be quiet during the activity. Tell the volunteers to close their eyes. Ask the volunteers to imitate wearing binoculars with their hands. Place the ready-made pyramid (which can be found in Appendix I) in the middle of the volunteers. Tell the volunteers that they are allowed to open their eyes, while still keeping their hands shaped as binoculars. One by one, ask each volunteer what colour the pyramid is. Next, tell them to remove their hands from their face and ask what colour(s) they can see now. If they still can only see one colour, tell them to tilt their head to the left and right and ask if they can now see more colours. Ask the observers why the volunteers have such different answers to the colour-question. Once you have discussed this, tell the volunteers to stand up and switch position with the volunteer opposite them. Then, one by one ask the volunteer to say what colours they see now. Discuss what happened in the activity using the questions stated below.

For volunteers:


-  How did your perspective change during the exercise?
-  Why do you think this is the case?

-  How did it feel when somebody had a different answer than you to the colour-question?

For observers:

-  Why was it easier for you to see more colours?
-  Is it bad that in the beginning you were only able to see one colour?
-  Can it be a problem when you cannot see what others are seeing? If so, why?

Example discussion questions

-  What did you think of the exercise?

This exercise aims to allow the students to understand that trying to see something from the perspective of others, can help you view the bigger picture. As well as to understand that not 'one viewpoint' is wrong or right, but that they all differ and are important to understand the situation as a whole.

### Alternative ways to conduct the activity:






Different geometrical shapes can be used, as well as different ways to create different perspectives. Coloured sides may be a simple and clear way to visualize different perspectives, but changes could be made in order to make the exercise suitable for different ages or according to the interests of the group.



## ACTIVITY 2: PERSPECTIVE IN CONFLICT(S)

During the first activity, children could understand perspective taking in a visual and tangible way. In this second exercise the focus is on cognitive perspective taking, which denotes the ability to understand other people's point of view, thoughts, intentions and motivations (Eisenberg et al., 2001). The students learn to take the perspective of another party and to find ways to resolve conflicts. By discussing conflicts that could possibly take place between two students, the children learn techniques to cope with such conflicts in a democratic way. Such programs can help children to adopt these techniques also in their daily life, in which conflicts are also present (Bickmore, 1999).

### Aims of the activity:

-  To improve perspective taking abilities.
-  To understand the duality of conflicted situations.
-  To teach the importance of conflict resolution and conflict avoidance.
-  To teach conflict resolution and conflict avoidance skills.
-  To incorporate conflict resolution methods into their daily lives and consequently create an understanding classroom atmosphere.

### Description:

**Length:** This task can take anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. If time allows, it is recommended to do this process several times with different conflicts.

**Preparation:** In order to maximize the variety of voices that are heard in the class, do not put the picked names back in the name-jar after those students have spoken. The teacher should read the selected conflict beforehand, so he or she is able to judge if the conflict might be too personal or unclear. The teacher can then choose to revise it or ask the picker to pick another ball. The teacher should be aware of their role as mediator, as this can be a sensitive topic.

**Materials:** Large open space, a jar filled with all the students' names, a basket (recommended size: paper bin), and pieces of paper and pens to write down the conflicts.


### Instruction





Sit the class down in a circle-formation on the floor and put an empty basket in the middle. Give every student a piece of paper and ask them to write down a conflict that could occur between two students A and B. These conflicts should not be linked to any real student(s). After they finished writing a conflict-situation, instruct the students to crumple the piece of



paper into a ball and try to throw their paper in the basket in the middle. The teacher chooses one of the students from the name-jar to be the 'picker', whose job will be to choose a ball from the basket and give it to the teacher. (Note: the name-jar contains the name of every student in the class once). The teacher will read out the conflict written on the paper he or she is handed. The picker is asked to handpick two names from the name-jar and read them out loud. The first person is asked to describe the perspective of person A in the conflict. The second person that is asked to describe the perspective of person B in the conflict. Once the two students have examined the different perspectives, general class discussion will take place.

Example discussion questions:

-  Can you understand both perspectives? Why?

-  How can the conflict be resolved?
-  How can this conflict be avoided in the future?
-  Do you think that conflict resolution is important? Why?
-  How can you apply these methods in your daily life?

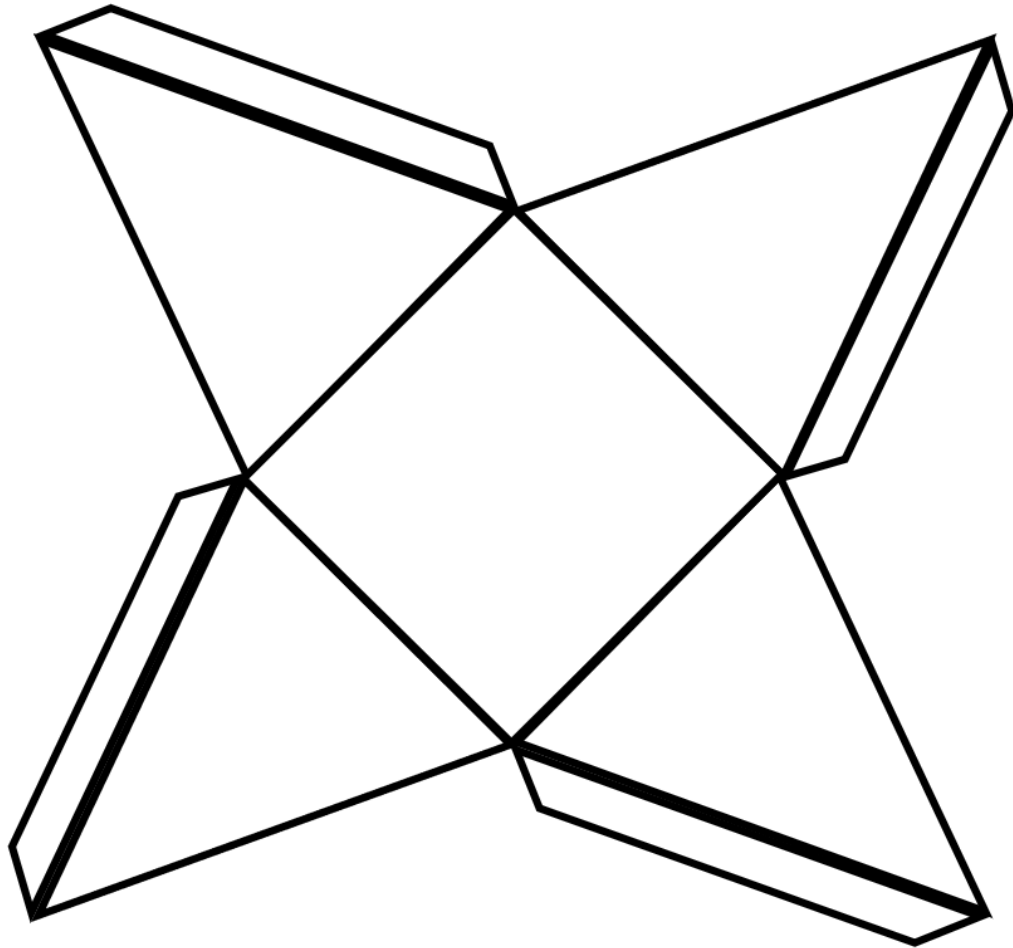
#### **Alternative ways to conduct the activity:**

Instead of letting the children write down possible conflicts that could happen between two students, the exercise could also revolve around societally relevant issues. Let the children then describe the different sides and perspectives of the issue (not necessarily the one they agree with).

Possible added step: have the students write down conflict resolution methods and put the most important ones on a poster that the teacher can hang up in the class.



MATERIAL I: CUT-OUT PYRAMID  
for Activity 1: Colourful pyramids





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# COHESION

*citizenship education  
on social inclusion*

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## IMIND

What do superheroes and pyramids have in common? They can be used to teach school-going children about these social competences. The IMIND lesson material provides teachers of primary schools with background information and step-by-step explained exercises about mindfulness, identity and roles, and perspective taking and conflict resolution.

Knowing who you are and what you want, and understanding that this might be different for others, allows you to engage in contact with other people. This is essential for positive ways of contact: making friends and developing (social) relationships. School is the perfect environment to learn and practice ways to improve your social competences.

Learning about and practicing social competences is both important and fun. IMIND hands you the tools to do so. Let's start!



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