

Who has power in a school?

Time: 45 minutes

Goal or purpose:

- To help people see that virtually everyone has some power.
- To convey the basic nonviolent understanding of power – that power comes from the obedience of others, and that there are various kinds of sources of power.

How it's done/facilitator's notes:

Explain that this exercise is about understanding 'power over' so that social change groups can identify effective application of their 'power with', namely their ability to have a positive impact on the world (for more on power, see 'nonviolence and power', p34)

Ask people to brainstorm all the people or groups who have power in a school. You will quickly get a list of pretty well everyone involved. If an important group or person is missing (Secretary of State/caretaker), you can add it yourself. Ideally this is done on two pieces of flip chart, so that you can write the people on one sheet and the source of power on the other. If working on one sheet, leave enough room between names to add in the source of power.

Next ask them why 'X' has power. Where does the power come from? What is its source? Why do people do what 'X' says? Time usually doesn't permit to do this for the whole list, but make sure you cover the head, the pupils, the caretaker, the school secretary, parents and Secretary of State. This will give a good range of sources. Write participants responses in a different coloured pen. The third stage is a facilitated discussion about power in general. Capture participants main points in a third colour. Try to draw out the core point of this exercise which is that the power of some comes from the obedience of others. People in a position of authority and power have gained that position because consciously or subconsciously others have given their own power over to them.

If you have enough time, begin this exercise by brainstorming why students, generally, obey teachers. Give a particular command as an example ('open your textbook, and do the first exercise on page 15'), and brainstorm all the reasons that a student would follow that command. This exercise can demonstrate how different people have power, and are able to exercise 'power over' because of the obedience of others.

This exercise is adapted from Turning The Tide:

http://www.turning-the-tide.org/resources/manual/powerchange#full_list

Nonviolence

Power and nonviolence
Conflict

Strategy

Theories of change
Constructive programme

Nonviolent actions

Working in groups
Consensus decision-making

Case studies

Nonviolent intervention in Kenya:
empowering community action for
social justice

Training

Pillars of power
Spectrum of Allies
The healthy tree/the problem tree