The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities

Violence & Bullying Prevention through Human Rights Education—Action Research

Student Guide

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Introduction

Safe and Caring Youth Action

The Youth Action projects provide an opportunity within the school for youth to identify and address specific issues or interests. Youth participants conduct research among their peers and then develop, undertake and evaluate projects that will address the issues/interests they uncover.

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities' has prepared this guide and other youth action and youth engagement resources to provide support for students and their adult supervisors to carry out each step in the youth action process.

The steps involved in the Action Research portion are:

1. **Selecting a Focus**

    - The focus or topic will be violence and bullying prevention through human rights education.

    - Human rights are a fundamental set of guarantees protecting people and groups from actions that interfere with fundamental freedoms and human dignity. Fourteen per cent of elementary school children reported they had been bullied because of their race or ethnicity. Studies also show that some high school students experienced significantly more bullying, racism, and bigotry related to their ethnic background.

2. **Collecting Data**

    - Focus groups will be conducted with peers and other groups of people as a means of collecting data.

3. **Analyzing Data**

    - Themes will be identified from the data collected.

4. **Reporting Your Results**

    - The action research process will be summarized in a report.

Involvement in this project encourages students to improve their research skills, problem-solving skills and knowledge in the area of their action plan. It provides a valuable opportunity for students to adopt leadership roles within their schools and to develop teamwork, communication and presentation skills.

Topic 1:   Why Research?

People conduct research for a variety of reasons:

- to address concerns;

- to gain information;

- to help people decide what action should be taken.

The research that you will be a part of is directly tied to social issues (issues that affect your school and community) and youth action (the action you will take).

Methods of Research and Data Collection

There are two main types of research.

1. **Qualitative research** is finding out about peoples' ideas, opinions and experiences. This kind of research is concerned with the quality of information rather than quantity. Because you are doing the research it will be considered "subjective" which means that it is specific to your school and community. In other words you are the "voice" of this research.

2. **Quantitative research** is about information that can be quantified, or expressed as an amount or percentage. This kind of research depends on data collection. As in science, quantitative research often relies on control variables and one variable that can be manipulated. This type of research will not be used in this youth action project.

Data can be collected through a variety of methods. Some commonly used methods include: surveys, interviews, case studies, observations and focus groups. For the purpose of this youth action project, your method of research will involve **focus groups.** Data collected from the project surveys may also be used to inform your next steps.

Topic 2:   Focus Groups

Focus groups are used when looking:

- for possible solutions or improvements;
- to identify a main topic or concern to focus on;
- for a variety of ideas and opinions from a range of people;
- to empower others to contribute to the process.

A focus group involves a small number of people, approximately six to ten, gathered together to discuss a topic of interest.

Facilitation team

Facilitate means to "make easier". You are now part of a facilitation team that will make it easier for the focus groups. The team introduces the topic of research and leads the group in a discussion. It is the team members' job to keep the group "focused" on the topic. You can do this by asking the guiding questions that you will develop to gather information. Your team is responsible for collecting the information produced by the focus group participants, analyzing the information and summarizing in a final report.

To obtain useful information from your sessions you need:

- a topic that matters to people;
- the right participants;
- a trusting atmosphere;
- a prepared facilitation team;
- a set of good questions;
- a system to record the information;
- a plan for analyzing and interpreting the data.

(Taken from Taking Measure, by Robby Champion. National Staff Development Council, vol. 24, no. 4, Fall 2003.)

Topic 3: Knowing Your Topic–Violence and Bullying Prevention through Human Rights Education

Human rights education is a participatory way of empowering people and communities, giving them the knowledge, attitudes, values and skills they need to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others. In an environment where people understand and respect one another and their rights, incidents of bullying, racism, discrimination and violence will decrease.

Learning About Your Topic

- Increase your background information to help you more fully understand your topic.

- Take notes of information that may help you when creating your questions.

- The more you learn, the better prepared you will be when you facilitate the discussion within the focus group.

- A person experienced in conducting focus groups says that time spent on research is time well spent.

There are two strategies that can be used to develop your background knowledge. They are:

Researching Published Material

Accessing published material may be a challenge because of the volume of reference material available. Ask your school or public librarian to assist you in designing an efficient way to search for print and web-based materials. Your teacher may have a list of resources you can access. You can narrow the search by limiting it to recent information, the past 5 years for example.

Connecting in the Community

Seek out expert information from every available source beginning your search in your school. Does your school counsellor have any information? Is there a department of community services in your area? Are there people at post-secondary institutions who are working in this area of study? Are there agencies or people in your local community who may be able to help you? Contact these people by telephone or e-mail to arrange a meeting to ask for advice.

Topic 4:   Working Independently Within Your Team

When collecting your background information, a standard format makes it easier to compare materials and share information with other team members involved in the project. The following template can be used to summarize the information you gather to share with your team.

Try to include three or four points under each heading.

Published Material	**Topic:**
Title Author Date Publisher Key Points–What did the author say about the issue?	

Connecting with the Community	**Topic:**
Name Position Date Phone/E-mail Key Points–What did the community contact say about the issue?	

(Adapted from Action Research Guide for Alberta Teachers, ATA, 2000.)

Topic 5:   Developing Your Focus Group Questions

Background Information

As you review your background information keep track of common themes that are apparent from your research. At the end of each meeting with your team, develop three or four questions that relate to the themes that have been discussed. Save these questions in your question bank and refer to these when finalizing the questions.

Research Topic: Bullying and Violence Prevention through Human Rights Education

Question Bank

- What does human rights education look like?

- What is bullying?

- What have you seen?

- What have you experienced?

- What methods do students use to bully each other?

Topic 6: Structuring Your Questions

The questions you ask during a focus group will determine the type of information you get from the participants. Sessions should be designed to encourage people to provide their opinions or experiences through a discussion about the topic. As a result, questions should be **open-ended** so that participants cannot answer with a simple "yes" or "no".

Remember that questions should:

- Explore people's attitudes, opinions and beliefs.

- Allow participants to answer in the way they want.

- Be open-ended and encourage participants to "open up".

- Be natural.

- Allow for conversation to flow between participants.

- Be flexible.

Focus group questions should not:

- Insinuate an opinion or suggest the answer that you are looking for.
    - How many times have you been bullied based on your race or culture? *This implies that the person has been bullied.*

- Allow only for a yes or no answer.

- Use acronyms, jargon or technical language.

- Be worded in a way that sounds like an interrogation. Avoid the question "why".

Topic 7:   Selecting Your Participants

When selecting the participants, it is important to first think about whose opinions you are interested in and who can provide you with the best information. Consider selecting participants that represent the diversity within your school. If your participants are representative of the entire student body, they are better able to help influence the action that develops from the focus group.

You may want to conduct more than one session and group people together with common connections or shared experiences. This will depend upon your topic. If you are asking questions about a sensitive issue, you will need to think about the comfort level of all the people you have grouped together.

Aim for six to ten people per session. More than ten participants may be difficult to control and there may be too many people to allow adequate participation from each member. Groups with fewer than six participants run the risk of not creating lively enough conversation to provide adequate information.

Notes:

Topic 8:   Your Team

The success of your focus group is often dependent upon your team being able to fulfill their roles. Therefore it is important that all team members are aware of the roles within the facilitation team. Ideally, each team member will be responsible for doing something they enjoy or something they do well. As a group, discuss the roles that each person feels the most comfortable fulfilling.

Focus group facilitation team members fulfill the following roles:

- **Moderators (1 or 2 people)**
    – Are very familiar with the purpose.
    – Guide the direction that the focus group takes.
    – Encourage lively and natural group discussion.
    – Ensure that each participant has an opportunity to share opinions.
    – Ensure that questions are answered within time allotted.
    – Ensure the focus group stays on topic.
    – *Characteristics of Your Moderators*
        ○ Knowledge of topic;
        ○ Leadership skills;
        ○ Sensitivity and tact;
        ○ Patience and flexibility;
        ○ Listening skills.

- **Recorder(s) (1 or more people)**
    – Are very familiar with the purpose.
    – Records the answers to the questions.
    – Records non-verbal communication.
    – Acts as a back-up to the moderator by asking any major questions not covered and asks follow up questions to clarify responses.
    – Keeps the moderator on topic and on time.
    – Are responsible for recording equipment (flip charts, markers, recording devices).
    – *Characteristics of Your Recorder(s)*
        ○ Attuned to the subtleties of body language;
        ○ Leadership skills;
        ○ Ability to recognize group dynamics;
        ○ Excellent written communication skills;
        ○ Ability to pick out key pieces of information from participant responses.

- **Assistants**
    – Are the hosts and take care of logistics (book the room, organize refreshments).

Topic 9:   Success of Your Team

The success of your team is dependent upon each team member being able to fulfill his or her roles. As you can see, each role has clear responsibilities. Sometimes one person's responsibilities will overlap with another person's responsibilities. This overlapping allows for fewer mistakes because the team is looking out for each other. The overlapping also means that it is very important that all team members communicate effectively with each other.

There may be times when you believe the session is losing control. Know that this is a normal feeling as a group facilitator. What is important here is that your entire facilitation group does not experience this at the same time.

Your facilitation team must maintain confidence when working with participants so that there is a feeling of ease and importance about the work being done. If your facilitation team loses confidence you may end up losing the interest of the group thereby affecting the quality of the information being gathered.

Notes:

Topic 10: Conducting Your Focus Group

The following is an overview of the entire process of conducting a focus group. It will start with the planning and conclude with the managing of the results of the focus group discussions.

10-1: Planning Your Focus Group

Prior to each focus group, the team should ensure that all preparations are complete. These preparations could include:

- Book a site that is an appropriate size and easy for participants to get to.

- Visit the site of the session so that you are aware of the room set up.

- Create a list of potential participants.

- Invite participants. This may be done in person, through written invitations or via e-mail. Ask noted participants to respond so you are aware of who will attend and can invite more, if necessary.

- Develop a checklist that includes all of the material that you need to bring to conduct the focus group. This may include:
    - participant list
    - chairs
    - equipment (pens, clipboard, recording devices, flipchart paper)
    - paper work (copy of focus group questions, note paper)
    - extra batteries
    - name tags
    - relevant questions written on flip chart paper (to keep group focused)
    - refreshments

- Test the equipment to make sure that it is in working order. The checklist should be used before every focus group, even when you feel you know all that is required from memory.

10-2: Beginning Your Focus Group

This part is important as it sets the tone for the whole session. The facilitation team will need to find a balance between a casual atmosphere and a formal one. The following are suggestions that may help you find this balance.

- Welcome the participants and thank them for coming.

- Introduce the team and provide a brief explanation of the purpose of the focus group and the team's project without giving away the nature of the research questions.

- Describe the different roles of the team.

- Ask the group if they feel comfortable with you using a audio recorder (if appropriate) as a means of collecting accurate information. Explain that this is only to ensure all responses are collected, as information is easily missed through note taking. Assure participants that all tapes or raw data will be destroyed once the data is analyzed.

- Describe how you would like the focus group to work. Encourage group discussions and different opinions.

- Inform participants that you would like to hear from everyone regarding their thoughts on the subject.

- Given that you hope to complete the session in the allotted time, explain to the group that you may need to move on to the next question before the group has completed the exploration of the previous question.

- Ask if participants have any questions or concerns before you begin.

- Begin the focus group with a question that will put the participants at ease. This question will likely be very open-ended and more general in nature. For example, "As I have just described I am interested in finding more about your understanding of human rights education and how knowing more can help reduce and prevent violence, bullying and other hurtful behaviour."

10-3: Proceeding With Your Focus Group Questions

Once the focus group session has been introduced, you can proceed with the prepared questions. Initially, it is important to ask the questions in exactly the same way as you have prepared them. Follow-up questions, that will not be listed, may come to mind as part of the discussion. Moderators and recorders are encouraged to ask these questions as they may provide for richer data. As you proceed, you may need to encourage the discussion. A variety of techniques can be used and are described in the following.

Techniques for Encouraging Discussion

- Maintain a friendly atmosphere so that participants feel comfortable.

- Pause after you ask a question. The pause should not last more than five seconds. Pausing will allow you to make eye contact with a participant as a means of encouraging them to respond and it may allow someone who is shy to also respond.

- Rephrase a question if participants are finding it difficult to answer.

- Ask a probing question to clarify a response from a participant. (For example, "Could you provide me with an example of what you mean?")

You may also find that sometimes participants do not respond in an ideal manner. These participants may create some problems with the group dynamics. The following describes techniques for controlling the discussion.

Techniques for Controlling the Discussion

- Some participants may want to answer all of the questions and speak on behalf of the group. Try avoiding eye contact with dominant talkers and using other subtle body language. If these techniques do not work with a dominant talker in your group, the teacher may need to step in to assist you.

- Some participants will be shy about responding. Try including them by addressing them by name or asking them specifically for input on a question.

Since the data should be representative of the group, before you continue on with the next question, be sure that all participants have had a chance to participate in the discussion. It is also important to keep track of participant agreement when one person is making a comment. For instance, if one person says that their school has been involved in two activities related to bullying and three people nod in agreement, writing this in your notes will provide you with more complete data than just writing down what the one person said. Keeping track of group agreement or disagreement of individual statements will determine the importance of each answer.

10-4: Keeping Track of Your Focus Group Data

Your group's ability to accurately record the data is highly important to the interpretation of the information. If the record of data is incorrect, your results will not be accurate.

The three main methods used to record data are note taking, tape recording and video recording. Although tape recording and video recording can be used as a back up for note taking, focus group sessions should always have a recorder present.

Recording notes involves:

- recording the number of participants involved in the focus group;

- summarizing all the responses for each question;

- noting the number of people in agreement or disagreement with other participants' responses;

- writing some direct quotations;

- writing up notes in detail immediately after the session;

- checking with the facilitation team to see if there was anything missed.

The audio recorder and video recorder should be placed in a stationary spot in the room so as not to be distracting. Remember that some people are shy about being recorded.

Notes:

10-5: Concluding Your Focus Group

It is important to ensure that participants leave the session feeling that their time has been well spent and that their contributions have been appreciated. These are some helpful tips to ensure the success of your focus group as you come to a close.

- Allow the recorder(s) to ask any clarifying questions that may come out of the note taking.

- Leave the last few minutes for any questions the participants might have and allow for closing comments from all participants.

- Share with the participants, again, what will come out of the focus group and how their contributions have been valuable to this process.

- Thank the participants for their time and their knowledge.

- If time and money is available, consider having a social time with snacks following the session.

Notes:

Topic 11: Debriefing Your Focus Group

It is important to have a short meeting with the group facilitation team immediately following the session to discuss all aspects of the focus group. During this meeting, make your comments about the session itself and not about the participants or your team members. For instance, you could say, "I think it is important to keep close track of the time allotted for each question. How can we do this?" Instead of saying, "Johnny, you need to signal us about time so that we do not go over." These kinds of conversations should focus on building your skills as a facilitation team.

Notes:

Topic 12: Analyzing Your Data

To analyze the data that is collected from the focus group or groups, the facilitation team must find connections between data, form judgements and determine answers to questions.

To analyze your data, the recorder(s) must first write out the notes from the focus group into the fullest possible record. If a video or a tape was made during the focus group, the recorder(s) will have used that data to ensure the accuracy of the written record. Each team member must be provided with a copy of the notes to review prior to the analysis meeting.

During the analysis meeting, each question will be analyzed by the team separately. The goal is to provide an answer to the question using the data provided. The answer may not be a simple one-sentence answer but may contain many different parts. It is important to include all parts that seem representative of the group.

The following steps should be used to help your group analyze your data:

- Work as a team.

- Review all answers provided for a particular question.

- Remember that a response that negates the necessity for the question is as important as a response that provides an answer to the question.

- Reach consensus about what the answers mean in relation to the question.

- Determine connections and themes within the group of answers provided.

- Summarize the answers to the question as briefly as possible.

- Move on to the next question.

Your analysis will provide information that will be used to guide your group in the selection of your action plans.

Topic 13: Reporting Your Results

Once the data has been analyzed, the team should prepare a final report of your focus group or groups and share the results.

The following is a template for a report that you could use.

Youth Action: _____

Youth Action Team Members: _____

School: _____

School District: _____

Grade Levels of Focus Group Participants: _____

Number of Focus Group Participants: _____

Teacher Supervisor(s): _____

Introduction

- *What was your topic?*

- *Introduce how your facilitation team managed this within your school.*

Review of Background Information

- *Summarize the information that you collected from your:*
  - *Connections in the community*
  - *Research of published material*

Summary of Process used

- *Describe your overall plan*

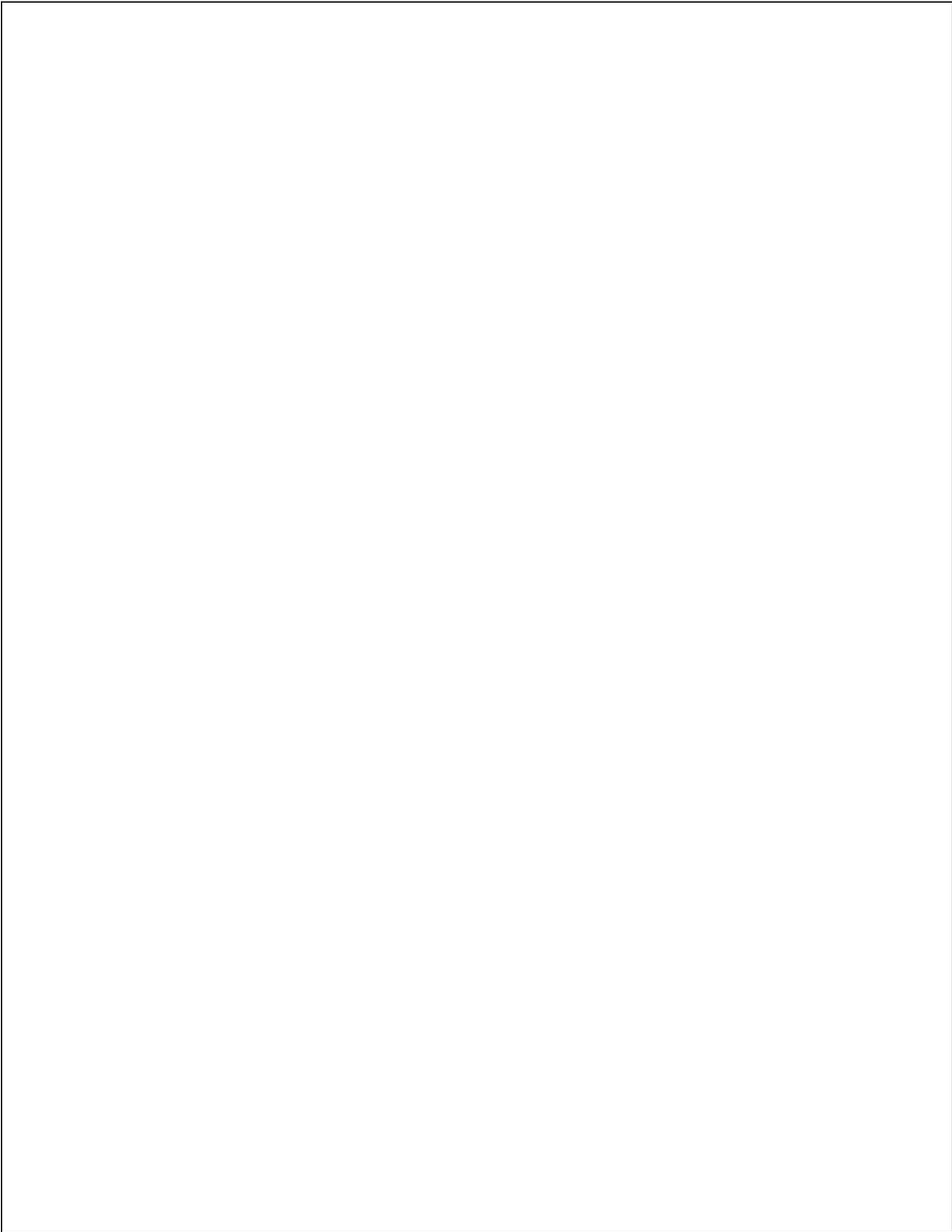- *List the questions being addressed*

Results and Conclusions

- *Summarize the answers to the questions*

- *Discuss your conclusions*

Implications

- *Discuss how this data informs your choice of your action plans.*

Notes: