



You might say...

“I hear about violence and learning but I don’t know how it applies to my teaching.

I know I did have a woman in my class last year—Sarah—her sister Mary said that Sarah’s husband Dan hits her— they were all in the class—I liked Dan he was always polite to me, but he did always need to be the best.

Other than that— no— and I have enough to worry about without adding something else—so many students aren’t really motivated and don’t show up half the time.”

I’m doing everything I can, but I’m not seeing the success I hoped for.

...but did you know:

Violence might affect what happens in your classroom more than you realize. It is highly likely more than a few people in your program—students, volunteers, you or your colleagues—have been hurt, abused, harassed or mistreated. Perhaps they, or you, don’t talk about it, and haven’t thought consciously about how the experience affects learning and teaching.

Violence is widespread. Statistics don’t really give us a clear picture of the extent of violence. They don’t reveal all forms or degrees, or show that some groups are more vulnerable to violence than others, but they do show us that the problem is too large to ignore. One estimate is: “51% of women have experienced at least one incidence of violence since the age of 16¹ .”

¹ Statistics Canada, Violence Against Women Survey, 1993.



People may not think of their experience as violence. Instead, they may say they have been hurt, or been through tough times, or see the harsh or humiliating treatment as normal—just “the way it is” —or even something they caused.

Violence doesn’t only happen in some other culture or community; rather, it happens to children and women of all ages everywhere. It also affects men, particularly gay and disabled men, and men whose race makes them targets. Some systemic inequalities and injustices are in themselves violent and increase vulnerability to violence. Such systemic inequalities include poverty, sexism, racism, colonialism, and discrimination against the old and people with disabilities. (For instance, a poor person may have to live where gangs rule the streets, a disabled person may be targeted by a rapist, and a person who endured residential school may become an alcoholic.) In every culture and community, people work to end both violence and cultural support for violence.

The details of violence look different in every culture. Violence in our own culture may be so familiar we don’t notice it. A useful definition of violence is “any way we have of violating the identity and integrity of another person”² Violence is on a continuum, from humiliating to life-threatening. Moreover, people may not think of their experience as violence. Instead, they may say they have been hurt, or been through tough times, or see the harsh or humiliating treatment as normal—just “the way it is”—or even something they caused.

² Parker Palmer, page 169, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. Jossey Bass, 2004

This set of information sheets is a chance to consider this issue, to take a second look and learn about ideas to help you teach more effectively, increase learning, and take better care of yourself and others. Addressing the impact of violence on learning is not as difficult as you might think, and it may transform some of your most frustrating challenges, leading to more success for everyone.

New approaches will help ALL students. They are vital to success for many survivors of violence, but they are also good teaching practice for everyone. We don’t need to know who has been through violence if we use these approaches and teach every group assuming that at least some people will have lived through some degree of violence. Each of these approaches will be explored in detail in the other information sheets in this set.


How does looking at the impact of violence support learning?

There are impacts in the classroom which might result from violence. They make learning hard, and teaching frustrating. Students may:

- **have trouble remembering, seem not motivated, or not to pay attention**
- **start and stop and not attend regularly, miss important tests and tasks**
- **be always angry and loud and ready for a fight, not settle and focus**
- **not connect with or value others, or themselves, put themselves and others down**
- **have been told learning disabilities, ADHD, intellectual disabilities, or mental health “disorders” explain all their learning difficulties**

What can I do to help everybody learn?

1. **Make it visible that violence is widespread.** Provide resources to help people address the violence in their present or past if they choose.
2. **Talk with students and colleagues about the impact of violence on learning.** Try to make sure no one feels they have to tell their story. But make it OK to have a difficult story.
3. **Develop curiosity about behaviours while avoiding judgement.** Consider how behaviours that get in the way of learning may have once helped with survival, and how you can gently support somebody when they want to try to change old patterns.
4. **Create safer learning environments.** Make your space free of all shaming and echoes of violence, including that directed at self. Intervene to reduce violence, however subtle.
5. **Create conditions to support learning.** Feed emotions, spirit, body and mind. Feeling joyous and hopeful, valued and valuable, comfortable and well-fed, capable and smart, all support learning.
6. **Create connections.** Build trust, create community, and connect to counselling, creative, and self-care resources for self and students.
7. **Create curriculum.** Use activities that bring the whole self—body, mind, emotions, and spirit—to learning and that acknowledge the impact of violence in many of our lives.



Where can I find more information and ideas?

Each of the six information sheets in this set will look at a learning problem through a typical journal entry and give more information about what might lead to the problems practitioners see.

You will find approaches to try and more information on <http://www.learningandviolence.net/> which is a major resource on the issue.

To start, read the **Overview**:
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/landv.htm>
and the **Problem**:
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/problem.htm>

For statistics check several places in **Violence** or elsewhere on the internet, for example: **SACHA**: <http://www.sacha.ca/home.php?sec=17&sub=43>

This is one in a set of six information sheets for adult literacy practitioners on learning and violence, written by Jenny Horsman, Spiral Community Resource Group. Funded by literacy coalitions in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Alberta, NWT and BC. October 2009. For more information: <http://www.learningandviolence.net/>

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What is literacy?


Literacy is **the** essential skill.


It is the ability to use printed information to function in society, at work and in the family.


It is the combination of thinking and social skills we need to analyze and use information to control our own lives, achieve our goals and develop our knowledge and potential.

How to reach us...

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