

After Paris attacks, teachers deciding what to say and how to say it

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A man holds a child in his arms outside of the French Embassy in Mexico City, Mexico, on Nov. 16, 2015, during a vigil for the victims of the Nov. 13 terror attacks in Paris. Photo: AP Photo/Marco Ugarte

BOSTON, Mass. — Terror attacks in France have left schools and parents struggling with what to say to children. They also are not sure how to say it.

Around the world, teachers had to decide whether to discuss with their students what happened in Paris on Friday night. Also, parents wondered whether to talk about the violence at all or how to explain it. From country to country, the topic was handled in different, and similar, ways.

Many schools held moments of silence to honor the hundreds of people who were killed or injured by gunmen in Paris. The attackers killed people at various places across the city. They targeted soccer games, concerts and cafes. Some schools openly talked about terrorism and the Paris attacks. Meanwhile, many teachers of younger students tried to protect them from information about what happened.

Sindy Garcia is a teacher at George Washington Carver Middle School in Miami, Florida. Garcia began her eighth-grade social studies class with a moment of silence. She then showed a video designed to teach students about the attacks.

Some Teachers Let Kids Do The Talking

During a discussion afterward, some in the class asked what Islamic State is and why the group wanted to attack France. The Islamic State extremist group has said it is responsible for the attacks. The group wants to set up its own country governed by Islamic law. Its fighters have captured parts of Syria and Iraq. The Islamic State is also called ISIS.

Garcia said she gave her students just enough information so they knew what was going on. "They'll know the number of deaths, they'll know the number of injured, but I won't show more than that," Garcia said.

At the Lycée Français de New York, students were called into assemblies by grade. The students were able to discuss the news and talk about their feelings.

"We took a really careful approach," said Elisabeth King, who is with the French-language school in New York City. She said it was important to listen to the children and ease their fears.

Newspaper Publishes Children's Edition

In Paris, schools reopened Monday as usual. In one public school, a teacher had a class of 7-year-old children sit close together on the floor. She explained there were attackers at a stadium. The teacher then said there were more and more police coming every minute to protect people.

A French newspaper, Liberation, published a special children's edition Monday.

At Downtown Magnets High School in Los Angeles, California, social studies teacher Daniel Jocz decided to stop his lesson about the attacks. Instead, he asked his 11th grade students if they had any questions. He then taught them about the history and politics of the Middle East and North Africa. All the attackers came from families originally from those two areas.

Jocz said he wanted his students to understand how complicated the situation was. He added that he knew it would not be easy for them, because many of his students did not know much about those areas of the world.

Kids Pick Up On Adult Anxiety, Expert Says

Donna Quan is the director of education for the Toronto, Canada, school district. Quan put out guidelines Monday to help teachers and parents discuss the attack. Tips included talking about students' concerns and asking them questions about their feelings.

"It is normal for people to try to make sense of things when a serious loss occurs," Quan said in the guidelines. She suggested that teachers and parents ask children to share their ideas about the attacks. "Help them to separate what they know from what they are guessing about."

Experts say parents should avoid talking about the attacks with children younger than 6. For older children, parents should watch the news as a family and then discuss it, said Dr. Steven Berkowitz. He is an expert on children and teens at the University of Pennsylvania.

Berkowitz said parents should be careful to avoid passing their own anxiety to their children.

Help Kids Reject Hate, Italian Official Urges

In the United States, each school decides on its own how to respond to the news. In other countries, government officials may make that decision for schools.

Italy's minister of education asked schools and universities to pause for a minute of silence. The official, Stefania Giannini, made another request. She asked Italian schools to spend at least an hour talking about the attacks with their students.

Giannini said in a message that educators must help students reject feelings of xenophobia or racism. Xenophobia is when people hate and fear people from other countries. Today, it is more important than ever to stop xenophobia and racism, she said.

Quiz

- 1 Select the paragraph from the section "Some Teachers Let Kids Do The Talking" that provides important background information about the attacks.
- 2 Which sentence from the section "Newspaper Publishes Children's Edition" supports the idea that there is no simple explanation for the attacks?
- (A) In one public school, a teacher had a class of 7-year-old children sit close together on the floor.
 - (B) A French newspaper, Liberation, published a special children's edition Monday.
 - (C) All the attackers came from families originally from those two areas.
 - (D) Jocz said he wanted his students to understand how complicated the situation was.

- 3 How does the following paragraph contribute to the development of the MAIN idea in the article?

Sindy Garcia is a teacher at George Washington Carver Middle School in Miami, Florida. Garcia began her eighth-grade social studies class with a moment of silence. She then showed a video designed to teach students about the attacks.

- (A) by giving an example
 - (B) by identifying a problem
 - (C) by comparing two classes
 - (D) by explaining the main idea
- 4 In the closing paragraph of the article, Giannini:
- (A) makes an argument
 - (B) makes a prediction
 - (C) summarizes the article
 - (D) explains the solution to a problem