



Conflict resolution in schools

report of the international seminar
held on March 2 and 3, 2000
in Soesterberg, the Netherlands

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FOR THE CULTURE OF PEACE



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Contents

Introduction	1
Appeal	2
1. The seminar	4
2. Conflict resolution in schools	5
Rationale	5
The goals of conflict resolution programmes	5
Types of conflict resolution programmes and related initiatives	5
A theoretical framework	7
What works	7
3. Peer mediation	11
Conflict resolution and peer mediation	11
The method	11
Additional benefits of peer mediation schemes	11
Effects	12
Criticism	12
What works	12
Recommended reading	13
List of participants	14
Useful websites	19

Introduction

The incidence of violence in schools is a cause of growing concern in many countries. Although the extent of the problem varies from one country to another, it is generally recognised that incidents of violence are a serious problem and that the traditional approach to reduce violence through school regulations and disciplinary measures fails to tackle the problem adequately. It is felt that an effective approach should focus on dealing with conflict as the underlying cause of violence. This view has inspired experiments with various types of conflict resolution programmes in many places. Several countries, including the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, and South-Africa, have gained extensive experience with conflict resolution programmes in schools.

The urgency of the problem of violence is also recognised at the supranational level. The United Nations have proclaimed the year 2000 as the 'International Year for the Culture of Peace'. The UN have also declared that the decade 2000-2010 will be the 'International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World'. This provides an inspiration as well as an international context for actions and policies at national levels, including the seminar 'Conflict resolution in schools', reported in this publication.

The seminar brought together professionals from all over the world to exchange information and experience with conflict resolution programmes and approaches in educational settings. The countries that attended represented an impressive body of knowledge and experience with respect to conflict resolution programmes: participants from the USA, which has the longest history in this respect, presented the Resolving Conflict Creatively Programme (RCCP) and the Workable Peace programme. Canada was represented by the Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation; South-Africa was represented by the Centre for Conflict Resolution and the Community Alliance for Safe Schools (CASS) of the Independent Projects Trust; the Centre for the Study of Conflict of the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, presented a peer mediation programme which forms part of the EMU Promoting School Project; Israel presented the Children Teaching Children project; the German Landesinstitut für Schule und Weiterbildung (North Rhine Westphalia) presented the Constructive Conflict Culture programme; the Norwegian participants presented a peer mediation programme that is currently being offered to all schools in Norway; the Netherlands was represented by several organisations, including the School Advisory Centre of Utrecht, the National Centre for School Improvement and Sardes Educational Services, which are involved in the development of conflict resolution and peer mediation programmes. (A full list of participants has been included in this report.)

I would like to express my sincere thanks, especially to Juliette Verhoeven, for her contribution to the setting up of the seminar, and to Lennart Vriens, Ada van der Linde, Michelle Stevens and Guido Walraven, who contributed to the preparation and the running of the seminar in various ways. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Van Dijk Studieboeken, the Compton Foundation, and the Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO for their financial support.

Paul van Tongeren
Executive Director
European Centre for Conflict Prevention

Organiser of the seminar

Appeal

Introduction

A group of 40 people - representing a wide range of expertise with programmes and projects in countries as diverse as Northern America, South Africa, Northern Ireland and Israel - came together for a conference in Soesterberg from March 2-3, 2000. The group seeks to contribute to the International Year for a Culture of Peace and the Decade for Peace and Non-violence for the Children in the World by exploring how conflict resolution in schools can help build a culture of peace.

Rationale

Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. . .

(Universal Appeal of Human Rights, Article 26, Paragraph 2)

Participants emphasised that violence in the schools is rooted in global systemic problems, such as economic and social disparities, disempowerment, alienation, gender-specific socialisation, ethnic tension, community fragmentation, and the availability of weapons. Schools on their own cannot solve all these problems. As important sources of socialisation, schools reflect the wider culture of violence and may themselves be a source of violence. However, schools can also be agents of change. Schools provide an arena for developing critical thinking, serve as a forum for analysing violence in society, and provide a means for young people to acquire and practise the values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills associated with tolerance, conflict management, dialogue and peace building. A school that encourages pupils to contribute and feel effective helps them acquire the skills and experience that empowers ongoing democratic participation.

There is a growing body of experience and scientific evidence indicating that conflict resolution programmes in schools can be effective. Conflict resolution skills are transferable to many aspects of the pupils' and teachers' lives. These programmes can result in the reduction of violence, improved learning environments, increased pupil self esteem, a strengthened sense of responsibility, enhanced academic achievement, and help teachers and pupils recognise and cope with violence related trauma.

With the support of a number of Nobel prize winners, the United Nations has declared the year

2000 as the International Year for a Culture of Peace and the first ten years of this millennium as the International Decade for Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. These initiatives counteract the premise that peace is only a question of politics but that violence is natural and inevitable. In order to solve social and political problems one must build a culture of peace based on thinking globally and acting locally.

Principles

Schools have a responsibility to teach for tolerance, to create and reinforce a sense of belonging, and to increase social cohesion and cultural understanding.

Schools can challenge pupils to recognise and accept responsibility for themselves as part of both the human family and the natural environment.

Conflict is an inherent part of living which can be used as an opportunity for learning and growth, but violence is not inevitable. Non-violent conflict resolution skills, strategies and processes can be learned.

In working towards a Culture of Peace, schools should employ a long term, holistic, and multi-disciplinary approach. The schools do not operate in a vacuum but must ally themselves with the larger community, including parents, cultural institutions, neighbourhood organisations, social services, and other agencies.

Conflict transformation towards a culture of peace is a basic value and not simply a technique.

It is crucial to create a learning community based on educating the whole child. This approach encompasses both the academic and non-academic areas, including emotional, spiritual, and moral growth; social skill building, and life-long learning.

Experiences and lessons learned

Introducing a conflict resolution programme

A programme must be appropriate to the specific school's culture.

Build consensus; the entire school must feel ownership of the programme.

The school community must understand and be involved in the process; the support of the principal is crucial.

The concept of conflict management should be introduced as a part of school program-development and planning for teacher training. Assistance and support from outside the school is necessary. Empowerment and active learning require teachers to share responsibilities and power with the pupils. Youth can take responsibility for vital components of the programme.

Implementing the programme

The programme should focus on behaviour as well as on attitudes.

Implementing programmes is a gradual and spiralling process; changes will not be the same in every school nor will results take place quickly. Potential activity programmes are: peer mediation; peer leaders programmes; peer counselling; peer mentoring and multicultural programmes dealing with prejudice stereotypes.

Follow up

For sustainability, a programme must build capacity for continuance within both the school and the larger community. Capacity-building includes empowerment; ongoing training of teachers, pupils, and parents; reflective practice and evaluation; and institutional support. Research and evaluation findings should be returned as feedback to the schools.

Research findings

Different programmes world-wide have shown that programmes can be useful to resolve conflicts. Intervention can be constructive at any place in the conflict continuum from primary prevention to post conflict reconstruction.

Quick fix or reactive approaches are not effective.

Schools that are involved in programmes which promote dialogue about differences can give pupils better mutual understanding of people in other cultures in the world. Programmes that tackle concrete conflicts in and around the schools can be used for better understanding of global problems.

Recommendations

- Analyse the cultural, structural, social context of the community, set appropriate goals, and design programmes accordingly.

- Make skills for dealing creatively with conflict a standard element in pre-service and in-service teacher training. Peer mediation should be specifically included as a key tool.
- Mainstream conflict resolution programmes into the core curriculum of the school instead of treating them as a 'frill' or 'add-on'.
- Implement a whole-school approach involving pupils, teachers, administrators, ancillary staff.
- Introduce conflict resolution programmes in the early years and continue them as a component of lifelong learning.
- Teach pupils skills to deal to deal with conflicts peacefully.
- Give teachers and pupils more opportunities to participate in decision making in schools.
- Urge governments to support the conflict-resolution work of schools and other institutions by pursuing active policies at all levels, encouraging the use of existing programmes, and promoting research and development work. Funding from government agencies is required and it must be ongoing and long-term.
- Conduct ongoing research and evaluation.
- Network with practitioners through an international exchange of experiences.

1. The seminar

The international seminar “Conflict resolution in schools” in Soesterberg, the Netherlands, brought together professionals from countries all over the world who are engaged in programmes aimed at resolving conflicts peacefully. The seminar marked the beginning of a national (Dutch) campaign entitled *Start talking, stop fighting*, which seeks to instil a culture of peace in schools by promoting alternative ways of dealing with conflicts.

The aims of the seminar were to:

- share international experience and expertise with regard to conflict resolution in schools
- make recommendations for practitioners and policy-makers
- promote international networking by professionals who are working in this field
- provide inspiration for concrete activities in the context of the International Year for the Culture of Peace

The seminar addressed a wide range of aspects related to safety at school and peaceful conflict resolution. One of the approaches that was given particular attention within the wider context of whole-school conflict resolution programmes was ‘peer mediation’, a method whereby pupils resolve conflicts between themselves without resorting to violence. Half of the seminar programme was devoted to presentations by Dutch and foreign participants, generally followed by brief discussions. The second half was devoted to drafting a joint appeal to inform practice and policy-making with regard to conflict resolution programmes in schools. The appeal has been included in this report.

Both the seminar and the campaign *Start talking, stop fighting* are initiatives of a coalition of 25 Dutch organisations, brought together by the European Centre for Conflict Prevention. The initiatives are a response to the call for an ‘International Year for the Culture of Peace’ by the General Assembly of the United Nations on the initiative of UNESCO.

2. Conflict resolution in schools

Rationale

Conflicts are an unavoidable aspect of our lives. This is not a problem in itself, as conflicts may lead to positive change. Problems arise when conflicts are solved, not by negotiation, but by the use of violence. Most incidents of violence in schools are the result of conflict among pupils or between teachers and pupils. Pupils who do not understand the nature of conflict and who lack the skills to solve a conflict peaceably are likely to ignore the cause of the conflict and easily resort to aggressive behaviour. Conflict resolution programmes are based on the view that pupils can learn to understand the nature of conflict and to acquire the skills to resolve these conflicts peaceably.

The rationale behind conflict resolution programmes was one of the subjects discussed at the seminar. The result of these discussions is included in the appeal. According to Canadian experience and theory with regard to conflict resolution programmes in schools, the following assumptions underlie school conflict resolution curricula and peer mediation programmes:

1. Conflict is an unavoidable part of living which can be used as an opportunity for pupil learning and growth.
2. Conflict resolution skills, strategies and processes can be learnt.
3. Violence and destructive disputes can be eliminated but not conflict.
4. Conflict can have positive results (social change occurs through dispute and controversy) and it is essential to a healthy, functioning society.
5. Learning conflict resolution skills is 'educational' and as important to the long-term growth and development of youth as the learning of academic subjects.
6. Pupils can learn to resolve most of their conflicts by themselves.
7. Pupils can resolve their conflict with the help of other pupils as effectively as they can with the assistance of adults.
8. Encouraging pupils to co-operatively resolve the cause of a conflict is more effective in preventing future conflict than administering punishment for past actions.

(Flaurie Storie, Conflict resolution in schools, a Canadian perspective, seminar reader)

Experiences reported in the seminar generally supported the accuracy of these assumptions. Two other assumptions, inspired by experience, were added:

9. In order for conflict resolution programmes to be effective, they must be introduced as part of a whole-school approach.
10. Effective conflict resolution approaches require a long-term commitment on the part of the all the parties involved.

The goals of conflict resolution programmes

Conflict resolution is an umbrella term which covers a wide range of approaches and programmes. The general goal of conflict resolutions programmes is: to reduce violence in schools by helping pupils learn to understand the nature of conflict and helping them acquire the skills to deal with conflicts in a constructive, non-violent way. Various associated goals may be linked to this, such as: fostering intercultural understanding among pupils and giving pupils a more independent and responsible role in school (empowerment).

The programmes seek to attain their goals by teaching pupils a range of skills and attitudes, including:

- communication skills
- negotiation skills
- respect for self and others
- co-operation skills
- tolerance
- democratic skills
- creativity
- moral skills

Although the immediate goal of conflict resolution programmes is the reduction of violent conflicts in school, there was general agreement among the participants in the seminar that, as the list above shows, conflict resolution programmes teach 'skills for life', i.e. skills that help pupils function adequately in various kinds of social contexts later in life. Thus, conflict resolution programmes are also seen as contributing to the long-term development of pupils and of society at large.

Types of conflict resolution programmes and related initiatives

The nature of the programmes presented and discussed at the seminar varied from specific training programmes aimed at teaching conflict resolution skills (e.g. peer mediation programmes) to general educational philosophies that seek to contribute in a more general sense to pupils' understanding of conflict (e.g. peace education). It should be noted that, in most cases, the programme formed part of a wider approach.

The following are examples of the types of programmes that were presented by the participants in the seminar.

Where relevant, information from the seminar reader has been added.

peer mediation

This type of approach was an important issue in the seminar. Peer mediation is a process whereby neutral pupils help other pupils solve their conflicts. The mediators are specifically trained for their role. They do not take sides, but help the disputants to understand each other's perspective in the conflict and to search for a solution. Some presentations focused on peer mediation as a separate subject (e.g. Norway), in others it was a component of a more comprehensive approach (e.g. USA, Canada, Netherlands, Northern Ireland).

multicultural education

This is a generic term for educational practices that take account explicitly of cultural diversity. Although the importance of addressing cultural diversity was not disputed, participants in the seminar workshops on this subject felt that, paradoxically, multicultural education could also be the cause of conflict in schools. From the perspective of conflict resolution, it was emphasised that respect and safety should be key issues in multicultural classes and that stereotyping and 'folklorist' labelling of cultures should be avoided.

bilingual education

Bilingual education refers to a type of teaching where pupils are taught in two languages. In Macedonia, where the education system is segregated along ethnic lines, bilingual ethnically mixed pre-school groups of Macedonian and Albanian children have been set up with the aim to encourage co-operation and understanding among the different ethnic groups by socialising children at an early age to tolerance and respect for diversity. Among other things, the children learn to solve conflicts constructively.

dialogue

In Israel, the programme *Children teaching children* - which is run by Givat Haviva, the Jewish-Arab Education Centre for Peace - attempts to foster dialogue between Jewish and Palestinian children. This approach was inspired by the observation that merely bringing pupils in contact with each other is not enough for real change to come about. Dialogue requires active intellectual and emotional involvement on the part of the

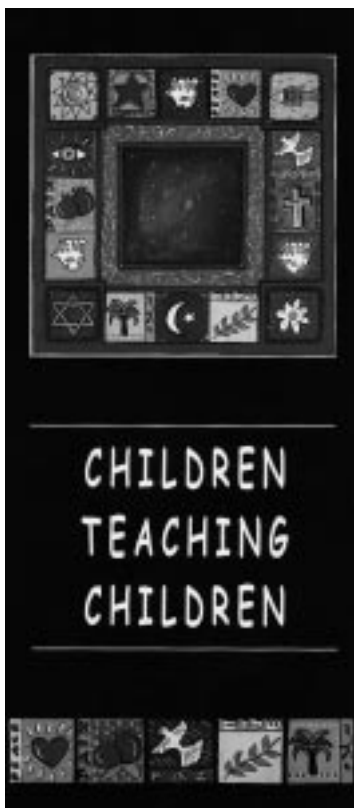
participants. The programme trains teachers to encourage dialogue among pupils.

peace education

The term 'peace education' refers to a range of approaches that are aimed at fostering a culture of peace among pupils. This may include classroom instruction in conflict resolution, global awareness, or social and ecological responsibility, as well as peer mediation. According to the North-South Centre, "peace education has not found yet its place in formal and informal education in Europe, nor a clear definition, nor a clear relationship with the wider field of citizenship-global education." However, the Centre also noted that peace education has produced a wide range of experiences, research and educational tools that educators may draw from to instil a culture of peace. One such tool has been developed by the Canadian organisation 'Voice of Women', which has developed a workshop kit that is being used in countries across the world.

Although this listing may seem to place all programmes on the same footing, it should be borne in mind that the programmes differ not only in approach, but also in other aspects:

- There are wide differences between the scale on which the programmes have been implemented. Some have been implemented on a large scale, such as the American programmes RCCP (Resolving Conflicts Creatively Programme) and Workable Peace, which are both running in more than 12 school districts across the country; the Norwegian peer mediation programme, which by law must be offered to all primary school in the country (and which has already been adopted by some 10 percent of schools); the Children Teaching Children programme in Israel, which reaches over 50,000 children, young people and adults each year; and the Dutch Safe School programme - a national campaign supported by the government and targeting all schools. Most of the other programmes operate on a smaller scale. The Dutch and Norwegian programmes are the only ones that are being implemented as an explicit part of national policy.
- Conflict resolution skills may be taught as a separate subject (e.g. communication skills, co-operative problem solving), but also as an integrated part of social studies, literature, science, and even math curricula. Some programmes and approaches presented at the seminar have been developed to be included - entirely or partly - in the school curriculum, for example RCCP, Workable Peace and Protecting Your School from Violence and Crime (guidelines developed for South-African schools by the Independent Project Trust). Other programmes, including most peer mediation programmes, are conducted outside the formal curriculum.
- Although most programmes focus on ways of dealing



with individual conflicts in school, a few also focus explicitly on learning about conflicts in the world outside school. For example, the Workable Peace project includes role plays about Guatemala, Israel, Rwanda and Northern Ireland; following these role plays, pupils are taught to apply what they have learnt about the intergroup conflicts in these countries to their own school and their own local communities.

- The goals pursued by the programmes are to a large extent dependent on the context in which they operate. For example, in countries such as Northern Ireland, Israel, South-Africa and Macedonia, where ethnic and religious conflicts are a dominant aspect of life, conflict resolution programmes tend to be more explicitly aimed at fostering understanding and tolerance towards other ethnic or religious groups. The programmes of other countries in many cases also include respect for cultural diversity among their goals, but they are more concerned with pupils' individual acceptance of cultural pluralism than with the reconciliation of two opposing communities. The approach described in *Protecting Your School from Violence and Crime* includes various types of security measures, which reflects the concern about the exceptionally high levels of violence in and around South-African schools.
- The amount of experience gained in the programmes ranges from about one to about fifteen years. Most programmes have between one and ten years of experience; some have been running for a long time, such as the RCCP programme, which started in 1985 and Children Teaching Children, which started in 1987.
- The programmes also differ in the age groups which they target. The bilingual programme in Macedonia caters for pre-school children; the RCCP programme and the Dutch programme *The Peaceable School* (an adaptation of the RCCP programme) start at pre-school age and continue to the end of primary school (12th grade); peer mediation programmes are also generally targeted at primary school pupils, although the method is also being applied in secondary schools; peace education programmes target various age groups.

- Finally, an important difference between the programmes concerns the nature of the groups targeted. Although most programmes are ultimately intended for school pupils, some are directly targeted at teachers and other educators in the hope to reach, through them, as many children as possible. Examples of this are the Israeli Children Teaching Children programme, the South-African Schools

Programme, the German Constructive Conflict Culture programme and the Dutch campaign *The Safe School*.

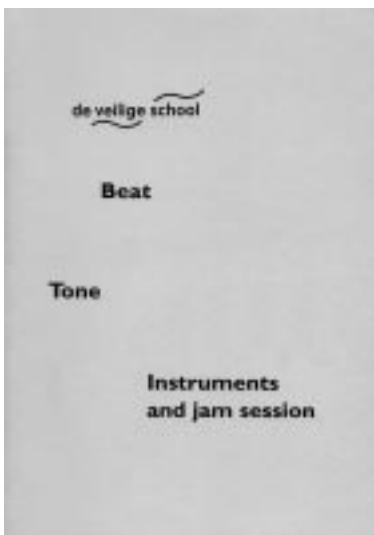
A theoretical framework

A theoretical and conceptual framework for conflict resolution programmes in schools was provided by Flaurie Storie of the Canadian International Institute of Applied Negotiation. Storie uses the term 'alternative dispute resolution' (ADR) to refer to methods for resolving disputes that have the goal of achieving consensus between the parties. ADR makes use of interest-based processes, which take account of the needs, wants, concerns, hopes, expectations and fears of the disputants, which lead to an understanding of the problems underlying conflict. ADR is based on a view of justice, power and desired outcome that is diametrically opposed to the traditional views held by schools. Schools traditionally deal with conflict by a system of retributive justice, where the desired outcome (punishment) is imposed via power-based ('power-over') processes. ADR is based on the view that justice should be reparative and restorative, using interest-based ('power-with') processes to reach a resolution of conflict and to restore the harmed relationship between the disputants. Interestingly, the EMU Promoting School Project of the Centre for the Study of Conflict (University of Ulster) in Northern Ireland, which was reported at the seminar by Jerry Tyrell, has also adopted this 'new paradigm' of restorative justice.

What works

It is important to know whether and under what circumstances conflict resolution programmes are effective, in order to justify the work that is being done in this field and to convince decision-makers of the usefulness of conflict intervention programmes. Reliable information is also important for the improvement of existing programmes and the development of new ones. The Dutch programme *The Peaceable School* is an example of a recently introduced programme that benefits from evaluation data and existing experience with the American RCCP programme. A new Dutch programme which intends to use the peer mediation approach to reduce violence in the streets is still being developed and has taken research data and information about good practice as its starting point.

Scientific evaluation studies are a way to find out to what extent a programme is effective, for whom it is effective and under what conditions. However, such studies are relatively scarce, as they tend to be difficult and expensive and they often take up considerable time. Not surprisingly then, much of the evidence of the effectiveness of conflict resolution programmes is based on practical experience and small-scale qualitative studies. Nevertheless, even though there was general agreement that more research is needed, the findings from research and experience reported at the seminar



provide a useful insight into a range of aspects that contribute to the success of programmes.

research evidence

Several of the programmes discussed at the seminar have been evaluated. The results of the evaluations were positive in some cases, but not in all. However, in all cases the evaluations yielded very useful information for the further implementation and development of the programmes. Although the reported findings are related to the programmes concerned, they clearly also have relevance for other programmes.

The Resolving Conflicts Creatively Programme (RCCP) The RCCP is one of the largest and longest running school-based violence prevention programmes in the USA. It was introduced in 1985 in public schools in New York City and has since spread to 12 other school districts in the USA. In New York alone, the programme currently reaches more than 300 teachers and 7,000 pupils each year. The programme seeks to involve the entire school community, using an implementation model called 'the learning communities model', which includes:

- four days of introductory workshops for principals and school leaders in the first year, followed by annual meetings
- five days of introductory conflict resolution workshops for 4-5 teachers per school each year
- seven days of school-based staff development for the teachers that have already received training
- three days of training for new peer mediation coaches
- meetings with all mediation coaches several times each year for skill enhancement, networking and problem solving concerning implementation

Teachers participate on a voluntary basis and teach conflict resolution lessons as part of the regular teaching programme.

In 1994 a two-year evaluation study was started to investigate the effectiveness of the programme. The study included 5,000 pupils in 15 schools.

The study found that:

- pupils receiving substantial RCCP instruction in the classroom were less likely to see their social world as hostile, to believe that violence is an acceptable way to deal with conflict and to choose aggression as a way to solve problems
- consistent RCCP instruction benefited all pupils, regardless of gender, age or risk-for-violence status
- mathematics and reading performance improved if pupils were given frequent and consistent instruction in RCCP

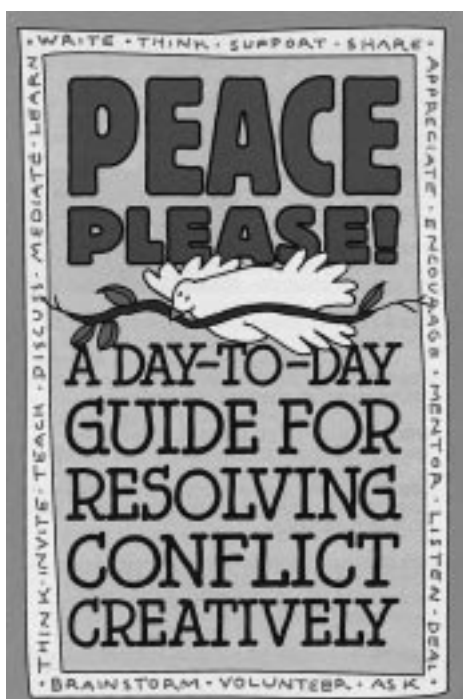
The study also found that, independent of pupils' participation in RCCP, their aggressive thoughts and behaviours increased over time. However, the rate of increase was significantly lower with children who had received a high number of RCCP lessons. This finding showed that school programmes cannot fully compensate for the influences to which children are exposed outside school (in the family, on the street, in the media); this underlines the need for schools to involve allies outside school in their efforts to reduce violence. The finding also showed that the programme had to be implemented with a considerable degree of intensity in order to have a significant effect. Experiences in other programmes support these conclusions (see also under 'practical experience').

The outcomes of the evaluation study have been taken into account the development of the Dutch version of the RCCP programme, which is now being piloted in four schools in the Netherlands by the Utrecht School Advisory Centre.

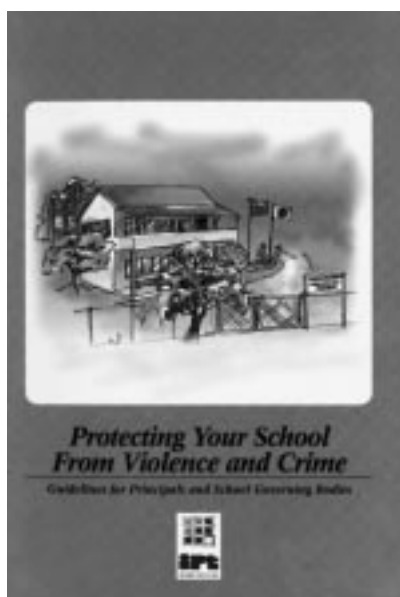
School safety in South-Africa

An evaluation of a peer mediation programme of the Independent Projects Trust in South Africa showed that, contrary to the expectations of the project leaders, the programme had virtually no impact in terms of lasting structures in the schools. Individuals did benefit from the programme, but not schools or communities. The evaluation also showed that the problems of violence were even more serious than had previously been assumed. The evaluation induced the project leaders to discontinue the peer mediation programme and to reconsider their approach. They started to look for people to co-operate with and held meetings with various people who were able to contribute to the development of a new approach. This led to the establishment of the Community Alliance for Safe Schools (CASS), an alliance of existing government, non-government, community-based and voluntary organisations that have joined forces to fight violence and crime.

Under the auspices of CASS, a comprehensive set of guidelines for schools was developed and published in a



brochure entitled *Protecting Your School from Violence and Crime*. The guidelines take the whole school and the school community as a starting point for improving school safety and reducing violence. A central aspect of this approach is the creation of a school security committee, which includes teachers, pupils and representatives of the school governing body, the local government, youth organisations, the Community Police Forum, local businesses and the local community. The school security committee drafts a school security plan, which covers such topics as school-community partnerships, securing the school environment, democratic school management and education/training for educators, community members and pupils (including mediation). The committee is responsible for implementing and monitoring the plan.



The approach described in the brochure is now being implemented by schools. An evaluation study was conducted of three schools in the Durban area that have adopted the guidelines and that are working together to implement them. The study was of a qualitative nature, using observation and interviews as the main data collection methods. These were some of the findings:

- The schools had adopted a more democratic type of management.
- Racial tensions in the schools were decreasing.
- The pupils were more open, less afraid to talk about incidents.
- Relations between schools and the police had improved.
- Relations between the three schools that formed the cluster had improved.
- Relations between the schools and the local community had improved.
- Fighting between pupils from the three schools had decreased.
- There were signs that the incidence of violence in the schools was decreasing.

Norway

In Norway a national programme to offer school-based peer mediation to all primary and lower secondary schools was piloted in the years 1995-1997. The phenomenon of mediation was not unfamiliar in Norway, as each municipality has access to a mediation board, where citizens can settle disputes instead of going to court. The experiment, in which some 45 schools participated, was carried out under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice. An evaluation study was carried out to study the implementation and the perceived

effects of mediation in the participating schools. The study used questionnaires and interviews to elicit comments from pupils about the selection of mediators and to gauge pupils', teachers', principals' and parents' perceptions of school-based peer mediation. The study also considered which issues are suitable for mediation and which are not. The outcomes were positive and the government decided to go ahead with the project.

Setting up an implementation structure for spreading the scattered expertise about peer mediation was one of the primary concerns in the next phase of the project. This included the establishment of networks at the national, county and municipal levels. The aim is to build capacity in each county, making assistance readily available for those schools that wish to introduce peer mediation. A total of about 350 schools have by now adopted peer mediation or are working on it. In one city, all 20 schools are participating. It is intended to evaluate the current phase of the project as well.

Promoting pro-social behaviour

In the Netherlands, the University of Nijmegen has conducted a two-year experiment to study the effect of educational conditions on the fostering of pro-social behaviour. It was hypothesised that increasing pupils' participation and responsibility in specifying and controlling behavioural and didactic rules would benefit the development of pupils' pro-social behaviour.

The experiment, which took place from 1995 to 1997, involved the participation of seven secondary schools with relatively high levels of aggression among pupils. Four schools took part as experimental schools, three served as control schools. The results showed that the class and school variables indeed influence the development of pupils' pro-social behaviour, even to a rather strong degree. Socio-pedagogical aspects had improved, but not maximally. It appeared to be difficult to realise the optimum implementation of the intervention programmes.

Conclusions

The findings of the four research studies above give support to research evidence from other studies quoted in the discussions at the seminar and in participants' presentations and contributions to the seminar reader.

As regards the effects of the programmes, the research evidence shows that they can have positive effects, both at individual level, at school level and at the level of the wider school community. However, it is also clear that school-based programmes cannot neutralise all of the violent influences to which children are exposed. As one participant put it: "Schools cannot change society." Also, it takes a long time for any innovation to take effect. In this respect, the introduction of conflict resolution programmes does differ from other innovations in education. In other words, it is unrealistic to expect conflict resolution programmes to yield immediate effects.

As regards the implementation of the programmes, the research evidence shows that implementation is the key to success or failure. Important conditions for effective implementation appear to be:

- commitment on the part of all the people involved (half-hearted implementation produces little effect and may even be detrimental, as the RCCP evaluation showed)
- thorough and sustained training of the people who carry out the programme in the school
- an appropriate organisational infrastructure

The reported research studies also show that, even though it is possible to make general statements about the effective implementation of programmes, it is important to evaluate the implementation of each programme independently, not just to see whether things go right, but also to see whether things go wrong. An illustrative example in this respect is the evaluation of the peer mediation programme in South-Africa, which yielded disappointing results, but which, for that very reason, also inspired a completely new approach to the project.

Practical experience

In addition to the findings of research studies, the participants in the seminar also reported findings based on their extensive experience with various types of conflict resolution programmes in schools. These experiences can be summarised as follows:

- Conflict resolution programmes in school are seen to be most effective when they involve the whole school community (staff, pupils, parents, representatives from the local community). In order to implement a programme effectively it is important first of all that it is accepted by the principal and the other staff in the school. Without their full support, any programme will have little chance of succeeding. To achieve this, it is important that the school staff are thoroughly informed about the potential benefits of the programme and about the consequences for the school. Staff should be made aware that adopting a conflict resolution programme is not adopting a new methodology or a technique, but accepting a change in the school culture - a change to which all those involved are expected to contribute. Also, the programme should be seen to take account of the specific situation of the school.
- An essential aspect of conflict resolution programmes is that they give pupils more responsibility, for instance as mediators in conflict situations, but also as partners in drafting safety regulations, or as organisers running after-school activities. This is a democratisation process that changes the traditionally hierarchical relationship between teachers and pupils, requiring teachers to share responsibilities and power with pupils. This may cause teachers to have reservations about adopting such a programme. This points once more to the need for building consensus in the whole school before the programme is introduced.

- Schools cannot be expected to implement programmes all on their own. They need outside assistance to get the programme running and to sustain it. On the other hand, they should be encouraged to develop a sense of ownership of the programme, without being dependent on outside help. That is why it is important to build capacity in the school and in the local community, i.e. to train adults in all aspects of the programme, so they in turn are capable of passing on their expertise by training other adults and pupils who are new to the programme.
- Conflict resolution programmes should not be seen as a separate, distinct instrument for solving a particular problem. The concept of conflict management should be introduced as an element of a wider process of school development and teacher training.
- School should not set their expectations too high. Implementing programmes is a gradual and spiralling process; changes will not be the same in every school nor will they happen quickly.
- Implementation of the programme should be monitored and evaluated, in order to ascertain to what extent the programme reaches its goals. If the programme is subjected to scientific evaluation by an outside agency, the results should be reported back to the school.
- Successful implementation of conflict resolution programmes involves a constant process of change and requires long-term commitment on the part of all those involved.

3. Peer mediation

Peer mediation is a much more familiar phenomenon in Anglo-Saxon countries than on the European continent (with Norway as a notable exception). In the Netherlands there are currently debates going on about introducing peer mediation in schools. The seminar provided a useful opportunity to learn from the experiences gained in other countries. These experiences can make a valuable contribution to the further development and implementation of similar programmes in the Netherlands and other European countries.

Conflict resolution and peer mediation

Peer mediation is a specific type of conflict resolution activity. Although peer mediation, as a subcategory of conflict resolution, has much in common with that broader category in terms of the goals pursued, there are also significant differences. As shown by the diversity of programmes and activities presented at the seminar, conflict resolution includes a wide range of techniques and activities. The subjects addressed in conflict resolution classrooms may concern conflicts between countries, between ethnic groups, between communities and between individuals; examples may be taken from present-day reality, from history or even from fiction. As regards the place of programmes in the school, conflict resolution programmes are generally taught to entire classrooms, with the curriculum being incorporated into the school programme, either as a separate subject, or as part of existing curriculum subjects. Peer mediation, on the other hand, is concerned with solving personal conflicts between pupils. Although the service of mediation is available to all pupils, usually only a limited number of selected pupils are trained as mediators. Mediation generally takes place outside the normal teaching hours.

The method

Peer mediation is a method whereby pupils are given the opportunity and the means to solve their own disputes. The disputants get together with a mediator, who acts as a neutral third party, to talk about their conflict and to try and find a solution that is acceptable to both parties. This requires the disputants to listen to each other's side of the dispute, to express their feelings, to try to understand the other person's perspective and feelings and to talk together about possible solutions. The mediator's role is to facilitate this process, without taking sides and without forcing a solution. The mediator encourages the disputants to talk about the conflict, summarises the conflict and the viewpoints of the two parties and helps them to 'brainstorm' about possible solutions. Together, they decide which solution is acceptable to both parties.

Experience with peer mediation programmes in various countries (e.g. USA, Canada, South Africa, United

Kingdom, Norway) has shown that the method can work well. Pupils of all ages appear to be able to acquire the skills that are needed to function as a mediator and once the system is in place, pupils use it with success to resolve conflicts.

Participants

The peer mediation method is used with all age ranges, from primary school pupils to adults. The programmes presented at the seminar involved primary school and lower secondary school pupils. Although, in principle, all pupils can become peer mediators, in practice usually a limited number of pupils are selected, who are then trained in the skills and techniques of peer mediation. Ideally, the team of mediators includes pupils from all year levels. The services of the mediators are available to all pupils. Cases may be referred to mediators by a teacher or by self-referral of the disputants.

Skills of peer mediators

Mediation requires a broad range of communication and negotiation skills on the part of the mediators. The mediator must have the ability to make the disputants feel at ease, to get them to talk openly about their dispute, to analyse the dispute objectively, to elicit possible solutions from the disputants and to arrive at an agreement that is acceptable to both parties. To fulfil these roles adequately, peer mediators receive training, partly in the form of role-playing, in such skills as:

- listening
- critical thinking
- problem solving
- analytical thinking
- summarising
- creative thinking
- empathy

Additional benefits of peer mediation schemes

In addition to its primary objective of resolving conflicts, peer mediation also has other major benefits for pupils:

- Peer mediators acquire a range of skills that are useful inside and outside school and that keep their value later in life. This aspect has inspired the following comment from Monica Williams, member of the Northern Ireland Assembly: "I never cease to be amazed by the Peer Mediation Programme of the EMU Promoting School Project at the University of Ulster. I often think if we as present day political negotiators had experienced the programme how much more quickly we could have reached an inclusive accommodation. But there is still a long way to go for us. It may well be that these young mediators will be the negotiators of the future. We will be better off for it." (seminar reader, p. 34). The relevance of negotiation skills in the divided society of Northern Ireland is obvious, but of course the skills of mediators are also useful in other contexts, such as work and family.
- An effective peer mediation scheme can be seen as an exercise in democratic participation. The mediation

service in a school is largely run by pupils. They work together with adult staff to sustain the service, to organise meetings, to plan mediation sessions, to make publicity, etc. Thus, peer mediation gives pupils an opportunity to play a responsible role in the school and to relate to staff on more equal terms than the traditional hierarchical relationships allow. Also, the practice of having pupils resolve their own disputes, in a way that requires and fosters mutual respect, tolerance and understanding, is not only an effective alternative to the traditional way of ending disputes by sanctions imposed by staff, but also creates a climate where pupils experience democracy as 'citizens' of the school and thus contributes to the preparation of pupils as citizens of a democratic society.

Effects

Although the reports at the seminar gave little information about effects of peer mediation schemes in terms of reduced violence in schools, there was information about other effects:

- the number of conflicts between pupils went down
- a large majority of conflicts was successfully mediated
- pupils and parents had positive perceptions of the mediation scheme

Criticism

A major criticism of the peer mediation method is that it does not offer equal benefits to all pupils. The mediators clearly benefit the most: they receive training in mediation skills and are given the opportunity to practise and further develop these skills in real situations. However, disputants benefit too, not only because in many cases conflicts are resolved successfully, but also because they learn about resolving conflicts peacefully from their experience as 'recipients' of mediation.

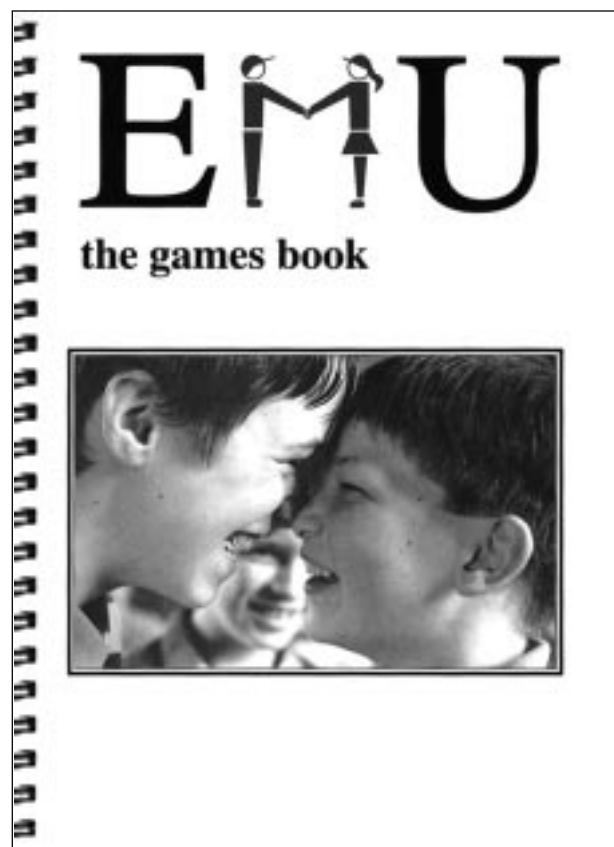
Although this criticism is not wholly unjustified at the individual level - it is obvious that the pupils who operate the scheme benefit more than the pupils who make use of it -, a counter-argument at the systemic level that was voiced by several participants in the seminar is that peer mediation should be given a place within the wider school organisation. Ideally, it should be part of a more extensive, 'whole-school' programme comprising a range of activities aimed at teaching pupils to understand conflict and non-violent ways of resolving them. Also, implementing and sustaining peer mediation requires schools to adopt a child-centred ethos and a view of justice that is restorative (i.e. aimed at restoring harmed relationships) rather than retributive (i.e. aimed at imposing punishments). For many schools, this implies a profound transformation of the school culture.

What works

In Northern Ireland, peer mediation was introduced within the wider context of Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU). Part of the statutory curriculum,

EMU "is about self-respect, and respect for others, and the improvement of relationships between people of differing cultural traditions". One of its objectives is that "pupils should develop knowledge and understanding of conflict in a variety of contexts and of approaches to its resolution by non-violent means". Peer mediation was introduced as a way of addressing this objective. Although this seems to place peer mediation in a specific context, the experiences that were reported offer a general insight into the do's and don'ts of introducing peer mediation in schools:

- If a school wants to be successful in implementing and sustaining a peer mediation programme, there needs to be a supportive principal, backing of the senior management and several enthusiastic teachers. The remainder of the staff should at least be informed about the programme and should be prepared to 'suspend their disbelief'.
- The school should have (or develop) a child-centred ethos and a restorative approach to problem solving and conflict resolution.
- The programme should be responsive to the school's own needs.
- The programme should not replace the school's discipline policy, but complement it.
- The school should develop a sense of ownership of the programme and build its own capacity for sustaining it.



Recommended reading

Adventures in peacemaking: a conflict resolution guide for school-age programs, by William Kreidler and Lisa Furlong with Libby Cowles and Ila Sahai Prouty, Grades K-6, Educators for Social Responsibility 1996.

Classroom conflict resolution training for grades 3-6, by Community Board Program. Rev. Ed. San Francisco, CA: Community Board Program, 1995.

Conflict resolution: a secondary school curriculum, by Gail Sadalla, Manti Henriquez and Meg Holmberg, San Francisco, CA: Community Board Program, 1987. ISBN 0-944594-00-X.

Conflict resolution: an elementary school curriculum, by Gail Sadalla, Meg Holmberg and Jim Halligan, San Francisco, CA: Community board program, 1987. ISBN 0-944-594-01-8.

Conflict resolution in education research and evaluation synopsis and bibliography 1998, by Marsha S. Blakeway, MSCM and Daniel M. Kmitta, Ed. D.

Conflict resolution: solving conflicts without violence, by Elaine Sevin, Amherst, MA: National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME).

Creative conflict resolution: more than 200 activities for keeping peace in the classroom K-6, by William J. Kreidler. Glenview: Good Year Books, 1984. ISBN 0-673-15642-7.

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Elementary perspectives 1: teaching concepts of peace and conflict, by William Kreidler, Cambridge, MA: Educators for social responsibility, 1990. ISBN 0-942349-01-6.

Everyone can win: how to resolve conflict, by Helena Cornelius and Shoshana Faire, Chatswood, NSW, Australia: the Conflict Resolution Network, 1989. ISBN 0-7318-0111-3.

Implementing conflict resolution and peer mediation skills into the school community, by Christina McMahon, Sydney: Conflict Resolution Network Schools Development, 1996.

Mediation works, conflict resolution and peer mediation manual for secondary schools and colleges, by Christiana Bentley, Marigold Bentley, John Conchie, Marian Liebmann, Ruth Musgrave, Pamela Williams, 1998. ISBN 1-872756-808

Peer mediation in primary schools, by Jerry Tyrrell and Seamus Farrell, 1995.

School mediation evaluation materials, by Jeffrey Jenkins, Ph. D. and Melinda Smith.

Students resolving conflict: peer Mediation in schools, by Richard Cohen, Grades 6-12, Scott, Foresman 1995.

The mediators handbook, by Jennifer Beer and Eileen Stief, New society press 1997. ISBN 0-86571-359-6.

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Useful websites

Association for the Development of Education in Africa
(ADEA)
www.bellanet.org/partners/adea/index.html

SoftPower Org.- A Conflict Resolution Role-Play Site
www.softpower.org/

Peace & Non-violence, Canadian Centres for Teaching
Peace
www.peace.ca/

WorldWide Classroom Library of International
Programs
www.worldwide.edu

Conflict Resolution Network CreNet
www.crenet.org

The Network: Interaction for Conflict resolution
www.nicr.ca

Education International
www.ei-ie.org

Bullying
www.successunlimited.co.uk

Child Rights Education International (international
distance learning project)
www.center.iupui.edu/credintl/home.html

Education Index
www.educationindex.com

Education for All, UNESCO
www.education.unesco.org/efa

Appeal of the Nobel Prize Laureates – International
Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non -Violence for the
Children in the World
www60.rapidsite.net/nobelw/eng/index.htm

Education World
www.education-world.com

The ERIC database
ericae.net

Oxfam International (campaign on basic education)
www.oxfam.org

Teachers@Work (features well over 2,000 rated and
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<http://teachers.work.co.nz>

The Council for Global Education
www.globaleducation.org

UN Cyberschoolbus
www.un.org/pubs/cyberschoolbus

Educators for Social Responsibility
www.esrnational.org

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