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Instructional Design

**Classroom Conflict Resolution Skills For Teachers:**

**Instructional Design**

Rationale

Effective conflict resolution in the classroom is much more than a valuable management tool, it can be a useful way to transform conflict into learning, teach social and behavioral lessons, and protect and nurture positive relationships (Martin, 2009). Also, successful conflict resolution entails more than getting one party to back down or for both parties to forget the arguing point. It requires analysis of the situation, determining the needs and feelings of all involved, prioritizing desired outcomes and enacting a solution.

A strong background and training in conflict resolution is an important tool for any teacher not only for classroom peace and growth but for navigating their professional careers and personal lives (Association for Conflict Resolution, 2007). This course is designed to provide educators with the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to handle conflict in a rational and productive way. With the ability to quickly identify the type of conflict, the teacher can reach a faster and more satisfying resolution, as well as steer the conflict away from destructive outcomes consequences to constructive ones with educational benefits.

The course is designed with a constructivist approach in which educators will attain a basic knowledge of conflict resolution and then build upon that knowledge so that they are able to apply what they have learned in real-life scenarios. Also, the instruction design will apply a group investigation model, so that, once basic concepts have been covered, educators can work in groups to assess and resolve various mock conflicts. The instructor should allow ample time in the beginning of the unit to discuss ways in which educators handle conflict as many people are able to resolve conflict through common sense means that closely resemble to methods taught in the unit. These instinctive methods merely need to be adjusted or supplemented and lets the educator realize that the ability to effectively resolve conflicts already lies within them.

**Subunit One: Defining and Understanding Conflict**

* Students will define conflict, discuss who experiences it, types of conflict, and its consequences.
* Students will explore what causes conflict, particularly in a classroom context.
* Students will identify the types and subtypes of conflict.
* Students will identify consequences of conflict.

**Subunit Two: Assessing Conflict**

* Students will recognize and distinguish between the different types of conflict.
* Students will explore methods of listening to and understanding opposing voices of conflict.
* Students will explore methods of recognizing and recording desired outcomes.

**Subunit Three: Achieving Resolution of Conflict**

* Students will explore ways of dissecting conflict into manageable components.
* Students will explore strategies of prioritizing the components of conflict.
* Students will identify the forms that resolution can take.
* Students will investigate ways in which resolution can be reached through the different forms.
* Students will recognize the need to revisit the resolution process until adequate consensus can be reached.

**Subunit Four: Application**

* Students will demonstrate ability to recognize conflict, its types, and possible outcomes.
* Students will demonstrate assessment and listening skills.
* Students will demonstrate ability to dissect and prioritize conflict components.
* Students will use acquired knowledge to choose an appropriate resolution form based on conflict type, desired outcomes, and component prioritization.

Pre-Assessment

Participants will be given a sheet with a conflict scenario at the top and asked to write a brief paragraph describing what they believe to be at the heart of the conflict and ways in which they would begin the resolution process. The scenario will be followed by a few general questions about classroom conflict and any previous training they have had.

Conflict Resolution for the Classroom – pre-assessment

Read the following conflict scenario, then write what you think may possibly be behind the conflict and ways in which you might try to begin work with the girls to resolve the problem.

Scenario: Juanita was upset because her best friend Sara walked by her this morning without saying a word. She didn't speak to Sara all day.

Have you ever been trained in conflict resolution before? If yes, in what context?

How often do you think you encounter conflict in your classroom?

How well equipped do you think you are to help resolve most classroom conflict?

Have you ever sought help in handling a classroom conflict?

Lesson Plans

Lesson One: Introduction to Conflict Resolution (60 minutes)

Objective: Students will define conflict, discuss who experiences it, and types of conflict.

Concepts/Skills: Conflict in its variations and types;

Empathy and perspective to recognize both sides.

Introductory Activities (20 minutes)

Open-ended discussion on conflict: what it is, what causes it, what types, what are the consequences. Students also discuss common types of conflict that they see in their classrooms and the staff room and what they think are effective strategies for resolving them. Make some notes on the board of strategies or actions that fit into the resolution approach being taught. It should be clear to students that they don’t need to learn conflict resolution “from scratch,” but rather that they’ve been doing it for years and need only to re-adjust or refocus what they already know.

Developmental Activities (20 minutes)

Participants are given Types of Conflict document and work in groups to compile a list of 1) instances in the school day where conflict may arise—one for each conflict type, and 2)ways in which each conflict may be destructive or constructive.

Concluding Activities (20 minutes)

Class discussion of list results.

What types of conflict are most seen in the classroom? How does this change from younger to older grades? Which conflicts are the most difficult to resolve? Why?

Participants are given copy of Nick Martin’s article, *Transforming Conflict in the Classroom* to be discussed in next meeting.

Materials:

Martin, N. (2009). *Transforming Conflict in the Classroom.* Retrieved from http://www.upeaceus.org/news/1163-transforming-conflict-in-the-classroom.html.

Oregon Mediation Center, Inc. (N.D.). *Types of Conflict*. Retrieved from: <http://www.internetmediator.com/medres/pg18.cfm>.

**Types of Conflict**

By evaluating a conflict according to the five categories below -- relationship, data, interest, structural and value -- we can begin to determine the causes of a conflict and design resolution strategies that will have a higher probability of success.

Relationship Conflicts

Relationship conflicts occur because of the presence of strong negative emotions, misperceptions or stereotypes, poor communication or miscommunication, or repetitive negative behaviors. Relationship problems often fuel disputes and lead to an unnecessary escalating spiral of destructive conflict. Supporting the safe and balanced expression of perspectives and emotions for acknowledgment (not agreement) is one effective approach to managing relational conflict.

Data Conflicts

Data conflicts occur when people lack information necessary to make wise decisions, are misinformed, disagree on which data is relevant, interpret information differently, or have competing assessment procedures. Some data conflicts may be unnecessary since they are caused by poor communication between the people in conflict. Other data conflicts may be genuine incompatibilities associated with data collection, interpretation or communication. Most data conflicts will have "data solutions."

Interest Conflicts

Interest conflicts are caused by competition over perceived incompatible needs. Conflicts of interest result when one or more of the parties believe that in order to satisfy his or her needs, the needs and interests of an opponent must be sacrificed. Interest-based conflict will commonly be expressed in positional terms. A variety of interests and intentions underlie and motivate positions in negotiation and must be addressed for maximized resolution. Interest-based conflicts may occur over substantive issues (such as money, physical resources, time, etc.); procedural issues (the way the dispute is to be resolved); and psychological issues (perceptions of trust, fairness, desire for participation, respect, etc.). For an interest-based dispute to be resolved, parties must be assisted to define and express their individual interests so that all of these interests may be jointly addressed. Interest-based conflict is best resolved through the maximizing integration of the parties' respective interests, positive intentions and desired experiential outcomes.

Structural Conflicts

Structural conflicts are caused by forces external to the people in dispute. Limited physical resources or authority, geographic constraints (distance or proximity), time (too little or too much), organizational changes, and so forth can make structural conflict seem like a crisis. It can be helpful to assist parties in conflict to appreciate the external forces and constraints bearing upon them. Structural conflicts will often have structural solutions. Parties' appreciation that a conflict has an external source can have the effect of them coming to jointly address the imposed difficulties.

Value Conflicts

Value conflicts are caused by perceived or actual incompatible belief systems. Values are beliefs that people use to give meaning to their lives. Values explain what is "good" or "bad," "right" or "wrong," "just" or "unjust." Differing values need not cause conflict. People can live together in harmony with different value systems. Value disputes arise only when people attempt to force one set of values on others or lay claim to exclusive value systems that do not allow for divergent beliefs. It is of no use to try to change value and belief systems during relatively short and strategic mediation interventions. It can, however, be helpful to support each participant's expression of their values and beliefs for acknowledgment by the other party.

Retrieved from: <http://www.internetmediator.com/medres/pg18.cfm>

Lesson Two: Introduction to Conflict Resolution (60 minutes)

Objective: Students will explore what causes conflict, particularly in a classroom context.

Concepts/Skills: Types of conflicts, recognizing types of conflicts, listening

Introductory Activities (20 minutes)

Begins with a discussion of Martin article and the merits of transforming conflict into learning tool. Then a guided discussion of the importance of listening in conflict resolution.

Key points of Martin article to cover are:

* Conflict need not always be eliminated, it can be redirected into learning experience.
* All ages, even the youngest, can learn how to resolve their conflicts peacefully.
* Under controlled conditions, some types of conflict can be created to provide an opportunity for transformation.
* Importance of listening in determining conflict type.

Developmental Activities (20 minutes)

Using scenarios provided by participants from their work on Types of Conflict (previous lesson), educators will discuss ways in which they can effectively listen to the competing voices in classroom conflict and how to ensure that each voice is given fair representation.

Working in groups, they will choose one scenario that fits in their assigned conflict type (instructor assigns) and role-play the conflict to discover how some voices are drowned out by loud personalities or needs are misconstrued. Each group will come up with a (hopefully) unique way of allowing each conflicting party to clearly state their position and their desired outcomes.

Each group will perform scenario, and state what they have determined to be the opposing voices and desired outcomes.

Concluding Activities (20 minutes)

Class will discuss the methods reached in the above exercise and which have the most merit. Participants are given Resolution Vocabulary handout for discussion in next session.

Materials: Resolution Vocabulary. Excerpted from Elementary Perspectives: Teaching Concepts of Peace and Conflict by William J. Kreidler

**Resolution Vocabulary**

**COMMUNICATE**  
Some conflicts start because people misunderstand each other. Talking things out and explaining might take care of it.

**NEGOTIATE**  
When two or more people decide to work out a conflict themselves, they might follow a set of steps. The steps help them work out the conflict or *negotiate*.

**MEDIATE**  
Sometimes people want to work out a problem but have trouble negotiating. They might ask someone to help them. That person is called a *mediator*. He or she *mediates* the conflict by helping the people work it out. The mediator does not tell the people what to do; he or she helps them decide for themselves.

**ARBITRATE**  
Sometimes a mediator does solve people's problems. Then he or she isn't called a mediator. He or she is called an *arbitrator*. When people ask an arbitrator to help them, they must agree to do whatever the arbitrator suggests.

**LITIGATE**   
When people can't work out their conflict themselves, they may go to a court and have a trial. They hire lawyers and go before a judge. A judge is like an arbitrator. The lawyers try to convince the judge that their client is right. The judge decides who is right according to the law and decides what solution there should be.

**LEGISLATE**  
To legislate is to make something the law or a rule. Some kinds of conflicts cause people to try to change laws or rules so the problem won't happen again.   
  
Excerpted from *Elementary Perspectives: Teaching Concepts of Peace and Conflict* by William J. Kreidler

Lesson Three: Introduction to Conflict Resolution (60 minutes)

Objective: Students will identify consequences of conflict.

Concepts/Skills: Positive and Negative consequences of conflict, recognition

Introductory Activities (20 minutes)

Resolution Vocabulary handout is discussed and related to personal experiences by participants. Have they used these methods before or similar methods? Ask for stories, again to highlight fact that they have been doing many of these approaches already.

Developmental Activities (20 minutes)

Students are given Identify the Resolution worksheet and about 5 minutes to read it. Then broken into their groups to complete the worksheet with the additional instruction to make note of the type of conflict as well as the ideal resolution type.

Concluding Activities (10 minutes)

Worksheet discussed and resolution methods explored further. Educators are asked to write a one-page narrative of the worst conflict they have experienced as a teacher or in their personal lives, analyzing the type, competing voices, desired outcomes, and best resolution type. These will be collected in the next session and repackaged by instructor for use in mock conflict resolution in subsequent sessions.

Materials: Identify the Resolution worksheet

**Identify the Resolution**

Grade Levels: **3 - 8**

**Directions:** Read the situations and identify what type of conflict resolution is being used:

1. Type:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   
   Roger and Kindra were arguing over who would get to use the box of markers. They realized that arguing was getting them nowhere, so they figured out several ways they could both use the markers. Then they chose the way they liked best.
2. Type:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   
   Jerome, Ted, and Alfredo are supposed to put up a bulletin board display together, but they can't agree on what the theme should be. They finally went to their teacher Mr. Nunez and asked him to choose the bulletin board theme.
3. Type:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   
   Juanita was upset because her best friend Sara walked by her this morning without saying a word. She didn't speak to Sara all day. Finally Sara got Luanita to say what was wrong. "I didn't even see you," Sara cried. "I would never walk by without saying something to you." It was all a misunderstanding.
4. Type:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   
   Ricardo and Diana were playing on the same softball team, but they both wanted to pitch. They were shouting at each other. Finally Monty came up and helped them work out a solution to the problem.
5. Type:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   
   Marla was being teased and called names by some kids in the class. She hated being called names. Every morning the class had a class meeting to discuss things. Marla suggested that there be a class rule against name-calling and teasing.
6. Type:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   
   Carmen has accused Reba of stealing things out of her locker. They have taken their problem to the student court. The court is made up of a high school girl, who is the judge, and a jury of eighth- and ninth-graders. They will present evidence to the court. The jury will decide if Reba is guilty. If she is, the judge will decide her punishment.

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A.Roger and Kindra were arguing over who would get to use the box of markers. They realized that arguing was getting them nowhere, so they figured out several ways they could both use the markers. Then they chose the way they liked best. (NEGOTIATE)

B.Jerome, Ted, and Alfredo are supposed to put up a bulletin board display together, but they can't agree on what the theme should be. They finally went to their teacher Mr. Nunez and asked him to choose the bulletin board theme. (ARBITRATE)

C.Juanita was upset because her best friend Sara walked by her this morning without saying a word. She didn't speak to Sara all day. Finally Sara got Luanita to say what was wrong. "I didn't even see you," Sara cried. "I would never walk by without saying something to you." It was all a misunderstanding. (COMMUNICATE)

D.Ricardo and Diana were playing on the same softball team, but they both wanted to pitch. They were shouting at each other. Finally Monty came up and helped them work out a solution to the problem. (MEDIATE)

E.Marla was being teased and called names by some kids in the class. She hated being called names. Every morning the class had a class meeting to discuss things. Marla suggested that there be a class rule against name-calling and teasing. (LEGISLATE)

F.Carmen has accused Reba of stealing things out of her locker. They have taken their problem to the student court. The court is made up of a high school girl, who is the judge, and a jury of eighth- and ninth-graders. They will present evidence to the court. The jury will decide if Reba is guilty. If she is, the judge will decide her punishment (LITIGATE)

•Conclude this activity by having a class discussion using the following questions:

a.Have you used one of these conflict resolution approaches? If so, describe the situation.

b.What are some other ways of resolving conflicts that are not on this handout? (compromise, problem solving, competing, using chance)

•To take the discussion even further, read the poem "Ations" on page 59 of Shel Silverstein's A Light in the Attic.

Read more on TeacherVision: http://www.teachervision.fen.com/interpersonal-skills/lesson-plan/2989.html?detoured=1#ixzz1EDbxSbwt

Post-Assessment

Following the completion of the unit, on the final session, educators will role-play conflict scenarios in which a fellow participant will intervene and facilitate a resolution. They will then peer critique each other’s effectiveness and give constructive feedback. Peer reviewers should focus on how well the type of conflict was recognized, how well different voices were heard, synthesis of desired outcomes, how well needs were prioritized, the appropriateness of resolution method chosen, overall ability.

**References**

Association for Conflict Resolution, Education Section. (2007). *Recommended Standards for School-Based Peer Mediation Programs 2007*. Washington, DC: Association for Conflict Resolution.

Martin, N. (2009). *Transforming Conflict in the Classroom.* Retrieved from http://www.upeaceus.org/news/1163-transforming-conflict-in-the-classroom.html.