



RESOURCE GUIDE

"Developing Caring Citizens and Skilled Problem Solvers"

Integrating the Principles and Practices of Conflict Resolution into the Middle School Classroom Culture and Curriculum

*If you are interested in receiving the full Resource Guide, it can be purchased from the coordinating organization, the [Colorado School Mediation Project](#) (Note link goes to web archive of site circa 2003 - The Guide may no longer be available...). The proceeds of this sale go to both the contributing organizations as well as to the project fund itself. It is meant to be used in conjunction with a standard conflict resolution curriculum, not in replacement of it.

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[Introduction](#)

"Conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity, and sets us at noting and contriving conflict is a 'sine qua non' of reflection and ingenuity."

John Dewey

Conflict resolution is about solving problems, building relationships and balancing unequal forms of power.

Welcome to the National Curriculum Integration Project. This project is meant to provide teachers with a process for infusing the critical life skills inherent in conflict resolution into the formal and informal curriculum. As such, this resource guide is designed as a framework to build upon and not a prescribed set of lessons to be taught. Teachers from around the country have told us that what they want most is a process for helping them create a comprehensive and coordinated school climate program that integrates and infuses the key principles and practices of conflict resolution into both the classroom culture and academic curriculum. This guide is a first attempt at doing just that.

Imagine for a moment what you would want a student entering the 21st century to know? What kind of education would you want them to have had? What kind of classroom would you have liked them to learn in? For many people today, they might answer that students should be prepared to live in a complex, multicultural world able to solve problems, communicate effectively and participate as an empowered citizen in a democracy. Many would also answer that students would be able to think critically and reflectively about real world issues and apply this knowledge in a productive, meaningful way. All recognize the importance of preparing youth to become caring citizens and skilled problem solvers.

Caring citizens and skilled problem solvers--these are key words that describe the focus of this integrated effort. Students are caring when they can appreciate the feelings and needs of self and others, when they can see beyond their own interests, and when they can demonstrate their concern during times of peace and times of need. Students are citizens when they act as participating members of a democratic community, when they are concerned and empowered to do good and work toward democratic, peaceable solutions.

Preparing students to be caring citizens and skilled problem solvers requires our focused attention because our world has changed and our kids have changed. We are teaching different youth than we have in recent years and our strategies must accommodate to meet their needs as individuals and the needs of a world that changes at an exponential rate. Education must move with our times, and our times right now call for strengthening our communities, building leaders, and renewing our commitment to democratic ideals and practices. We are at a turning point as a country and the classroom is a critical place to teach the skills and attitudes of democracy, caring, problem solving and intergroup relations.

Students learning to be a caring member of a democratic community often learn first and most powerfully through the lessons taught and modeled in the classroom. Students learning to be skilled problem solvers also learn this when working through complex problems, analyzing problems and conflicts in history and literature, and practicing effective communication skills in the classroom.

Most teachers recognize that students benefit when their learning is connected

to real life events, issues and concerns. No longer are students passive vessels in which static knowledge is to be poured and good grades are determined by how well they recite what was put in. Students require active engagement-with knowledge, with teachers and with their peers. And, in order for their active engagement to be productive, it is best done in a safe, caring and respectful classroom environment. When students feel they belong to a community of learners, ideas can be expressed openly without attack or judgment. When students don't feel safe to be themselves, when they are more worried about their status and image, when they don't have the skills to make good decisions and handle day-to-day conflicts, they are less likely to tap into the full extent of their potential as students-and as members in a learning community.

Reflection/Inquiry Question:

What is your image of an educated middle school student prepared for the 21st century?

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[Educational Theories](#)

THE PROJECT IS BASED ON THE FOLLOWING KEY EDUCATIONAL THEORIES:

1. Emotional Intelligence (Goleman), Learning Readiness and Brain Based Learning (Sylwester)

Emotion is critical to the education process because it drives attention, which drives learning and memory. Learning is a relational process that improves when student relationships are attended to and included in the learning process.

2. Cooperative Learning (Johnson and Johnson), Multiple Intelligences (Gardner) and Learner-Centered Psychological Principles (McCombs)

Cooperative, student centered learning environments that focus on a variety of intelligences, beyond the cognitive intelligence, creates more effective learning for students of all backgrounds.

3. Conflict Prevention and Competence (Fisher and Ury)

Conflict is a natural part of life and can promote growth and learning when approached with the appropriate skills, attitudes and processes.

4. Intergroup Relations (Allport, Banks)

Developing positive, productive intergroup relations requires building certain conditions into the context of intergroup relations (e.g., equal status, opportunity for building meaningful relationships, cooperative interactions and institutional support) It includes interrupting prejudice, being aware of bias and oppression, and developing a mature, democratic personality based on inner strength.

5. Curriculum Integration (Hayes Jacobs)

Carefully designing a set of experiences for kids within a range of disciplines in an organized manner enhances students' learning. Integration among the disciplines helps students see the natural relationships among disciplines and make their learning connect with the real world.

These theories drive an integrated, comprehensive conflict resolution project. It is generally important for participants to be familiar with the basic theories and principles behind each of the theories so that the practices are informed and guided by them. As this comprehensive approach has a large vision, we recommend that those implementing these principles and practices develop a certain competency with one area before moving too soon to the next.

In many of our sites, teachers found that understanding the basic principles, values and theoretical framework of each area was key to their ability to deliver and model the material to students. We believe that principles and values drive content and skills and when we clearly lay out these principles and values to both students and other teachers, it stimulates critical conversation and achieves a clarity of purpose useful for later activities.

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[The Framework for an Integrated and Comprehensive Approach](#)

The framework for an integrated and comprehensive approach to conflict resolution education and school climate change has three core elements:

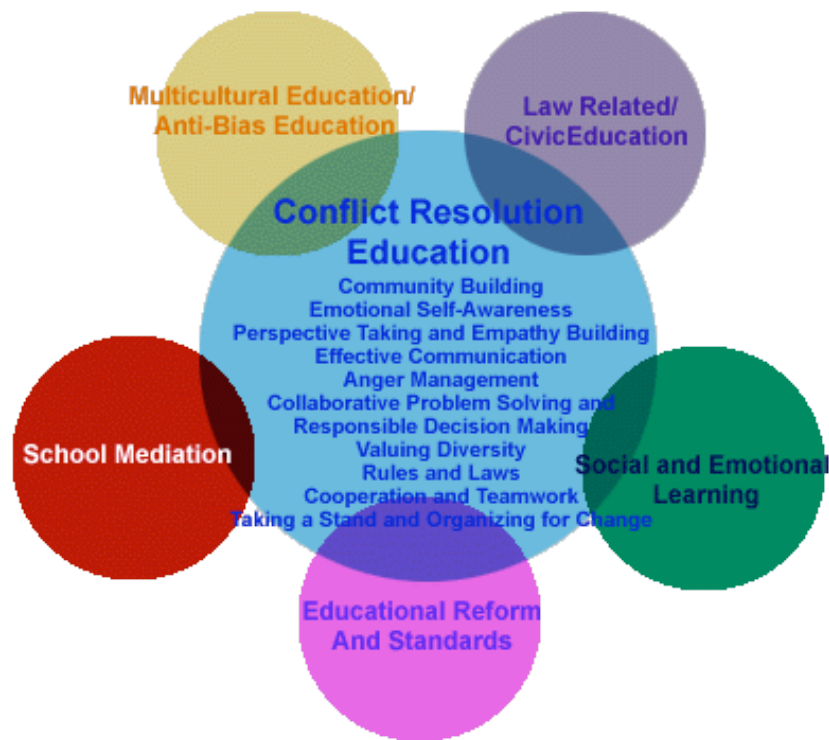
- **classroom/school culture** (teacher modeling, peaceable classroom practices, direct skill instruction)
- **curriculum content**
- **teaching strategies**

Classroom culture refers to the "ways things are done" in the classroom and includes such things as: how students feel and behave, what rules and routines are established, the relationship the teacher has with her or his students, and the implicit and explicit norms and values that exist. Curriculum content refers to the academic lessons and activities that are used in the learning process. Teaching strategies refers to the ways teachers structure learning activities.

Each of these elements provide opportunities for teachers to teach, model and reinforce the key concepts, skills and processes of conflict resolution, multicultural/anti-bias education, law related/civic education and social and emotional learning. While these three core elements are separate in their own right, they are also a cohesive unit that work together simultaneously and ideally synchronistically. Our goal is to have teachers recognize the importance of working consciously on all three elements in a coordinated fashion.

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Core Components of a Curriculum Integration Program



Integrating Diversity and Conflict Resolution into Curriculum



Comprehensive Conflict Resolution Course Curriculum Outline

Integrating Key Aspects of Social and Emotional Learning, Multi-Cultural Education and Civic Education, Listed in Sequence

EXAMPLES OF LESSONS/CONCEPTS

- 1) **Community Building** e.g.- group norms and ground rules; affirmation (put

ups and put downs); developing safety, respect, trust & a sense of belonging; broken agreements/trust; valuing differing points of views; intimacy and bonding

2) **Emotional Self-Awareness & Self-Regulation** e.g. ♦ identifying and managing emotions; recognizing causes of emotions (thoughts and needs); stress management

3) **Understanding Conflict & Introduction to Problem Solving Process** e.g.- conflict as normal & productive; win-win; conflict styles; escalation and de-escalation; positions and interests; dynamics of power; distinguishing violence; conflict/problem analysis; problem solving process

4) **Perspective Taking & Empathy Building** e.g.- identifying and valuing different points of views; listening to and being sensitive to others feelings, points of view and ideas; understanding the limitations of one's own perspective and assumptions

5) **Effective Communication**

a) Listening Skills e.g.- summarizing; reframing; listening from the heart; neutral questioning; critical questioning; open-mindedness; non-verbal cues; reflection skills; empathy skills

b) Expression Skills e.g.- "I" statements; assertiveness skills; expressing and explaining ideas; listing issues or concepts; interrupting prejudice

6) **Anger Management** e.g. - anger as normal; anger styles; passive, aggressive and assertive behaviors; managing anger; anger and violence; coping with anger

7) **Problem Solving & Decision Making Skills** e.g.- problem solving processes: internal decision making, negotiation, mediation, arbitration; critical thinking, brainstorming/creative thinking; actions and consequences; agreements; goal setting; forgiveness and reconciliation; restitution; collaboration; council circle; harmonizing differing feelings and points of views

8) **Valuing Diversity** e.g. - cultural heritage; appreciation of diversity (cultural, gender, ethnic, social class, handicap)

9) **Prejudice Reduction & Anti-Bias Education** e.g.- understanding and identifying stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination, bias, racism and oppression; reconciliation; restitution; empathy; valuing differing points of views; issues of power and status

10) **Rules & Laws, Rights & Responsibilities** e.g.- rules/laws; rights and responsibilities (civil rights); fairness; democracy; justice (restorative justice); punishment; equality; power; authority and status; harassment

11) **Cooperation & Teamwork** e.g.- cooperative learning skills; appropriate

play; self-esteem and conflict; leadership; accountability in cooperative learning situations; focusing on tasks at hand; setting goals

12) **Taking a Stand & Organizing for Change** e.g.- assertiveness; organizing and facilitating meetings; setting agendas; presentation skills; writing petitions and letters to representatives

Teaching Strategies (for teachers) e.g.- paired sharing; concentric circles; small group rotation stations; role plays; brainstorming and webbing; cooperative learning groups; facilitated discussions; constructive controversy; socratic/clarifying questioning; micro-labs; case studies; storytelling; journaling; reflection time; developing critical thinking; promoting intellectual skepticism; extending student thinking.

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Creating a Caring Classroom Climate

(Reprinted with the permission of the Colorado School Mediation Project)

Taking time to get to know one another.

- ♦ Research and discuss names and cultural heritages.
- Share interests, successes, concerns, news and goods.
- Seek to establish respectful relationships.

Taking time to establish class guidelines and expectations of behavior and achievement.

- Allow each class to set their own "class constitution."
- Post and review the groundrules periodically.
- Set high standards for both behavior and achievement.

Establishing cooperative and collaborative learning groups.

- Set, demonstrate and review group norms and roles.
- Foster a sense of collaboration rather than competition.
- Teach students how to work in teams and communicate when problems arise.
- Don't change groups or teams too often.

Creating a noncompetitive, nonjudgmental class environment that focuses on positive recognition and validation.

- Look at ways in which your classroom is negatively competitive and judgmental and seek to offer authentic, positive forms of recognition and affirmation.
- See if students are more interested in grades and recognition than learning.

- Consider establishing a "no hands in the air when another person is talking" rule.

Taking on the role of "teacher as mediator of knowledge and conflicts" rather than "teacher as arbitrator of knowledge and conflicts."

Facilitate constructive, critical discussions in a safe environment.

- Offer advice when needed and asked for, empower students to learn and question.
- Use active listening, critical questioning, reframing, creative and critical thinking.

Developing a "learner-centered" classroom.

- Develop shared leadership practices.
- Develop classroom roles and responsibilities.
- Focus on internal discipline and rewards and seek to lessen external rewards.

Seeking to make learning apply to students' lives and their questions.

- Connect lessons with real life experiences.
- Help students connect their perspective with others.
- Focus on emotional and ethical issues.

Establishing a classroom based on equity, fairness and respect for all types of diversity

- help create and enforce norms of no put downs
- assess and teach to differing learning styles
- support cross-cultural sharing
- counter stereotypical information with information and opportunity for interpersonal and intergroup sharing of experience

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[Benchmark Foundation](#) [Abilities of a Peaceable Classroom](#)

(adapted from and used with permission of Educators for Social Responsibility, 23 Garden St., Cambridge, MA. 02138; 617-492-1764)

Teachers involve students in building a caring, respectful, responsible classroom culture:

- Discusses and creates a vision of a caring, respectful, and responsible learning community
- Makes agreements about how to work, live and learn together at the beginning of the school year

- Provides community building activities so that students get to know each other at the beginning of the year
- Includes at least one gathering and one closing activity in the course of each week's routine
- Provides weekly opportunities for individual and group feedback, reflection and assessment about how students are experiencing what they are doing and learning in the classroom
- Introduces clear processes for dealing with controversy constructively and addresses issues of concern that come up in the classroom
- Uses class meetings and win-win problem solving for discussing and resolving problems in ways that meet teacher, student and group needs
- Provides classroom routines, activities, and check-ins that create a readiness to learn and help students to settle in and focus
- Offers choices and negotiating options for homework, review and study sessions, class assignments, projects and tests
- Makes participation a significant part of academic grading and asks students to assess and reflect on their participation in specific activities at the end of a unit, and near the end of a grading period
- Identifies both academic and social goals and skills for lessons and activities: WHAT is to be learned, HOW students will work together to learn it, HOW students can support each others' learning
- Makes it safe for students to express, acknowledge, and deal with feelings
- Increases opportunities to affirm individuals and the group through positive attention and rituals and routines that celebrate successes
- Addresses personal, racial, ethnic and gender put-downs in ways that help to interrupt and reduce put-downs and prejudice

Teachers model the following skills and ensure that students learn and practice them on a regular basis:

- Active listening (paraphrasing, reflecting, reframing, creative questioning, summarizing)
- I-Statements (assertion, appreciation, speaking from one's own perspective and experience)
- Managing upset and angry feelings (empathic listening, problem solving, stress management)
- Problem-solving/negotiation processes (define problem, hear feelings & needs, brainstorm options, create joint solution)
- Giving and receiving feedback

Teachers use instructional strategies that promote cooperation, personalize learning, and integrate academic, emotional, and social dimensions of learning, such as:

- micro-labs
- go-rounds
- pair-shares
- collaborative problem solving
- brainstorming

- rotation stations
- cooperative grouping
- paired sharing
- role playing
- creative controversy
- brainstorming, webbing
- socratic/clarifying questioning
- storytelling
- journaling, portfolios
- case studies, conflict analysis
- inquiry/discussion groups
- duet poetry
- quote reflection and discussion
- feelings collage, painting
- write a new ending
- videotaping, tape recording
- visualization
- reflection time
- goal setting session
- service learning


Teachers handle student problems responsibly and respectfully:

- Invites students to talk and say what they need before asking questions and giving advice
- Facilitates students' own problem solving process
- Speaks to students privately about difficulties
- Clarifies what is negotiable and non-negotiable in the course and classroom
- Focuses on one problem at a time and identifies common goals and interests
- Offers choices and makes suggestions and requests rather than demands
- Admits mistakes and apologizes when it is appropriate
- Shares concerns using I-Statements and explains why particular behaviors are not acceptable
- Defuses upset and angry feelings before moving to problem solving
- Avoid sarcastic, blaming and embarrassing remarks directed at students
- Reframe confrontational remarks so students can recover and self-correct before the situation escalates
- Emphasize problem solving that focuses on the future, rather than punishment that revisits the past
- Explores alternative ways to meet academic requirements/commitments

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**[Outline of a Successful](#)
[Integrated Conflict Resolution Program](#)**

We believe a successful program will occur when you as teachers:

1. Develop the conditions for classroom excellence and learning partnerships by focusing on the testing of your own ideas-both as individuals and as teaching teams.
2. Form teacher study groups which meet regularly.
3. Focus on long term goals and visions and keep working to improve these rather than changing with each new "recipe for success."
4. Model the behaviors and principles you are attempting to teach  both with students and with colleagues.
5. Utilize innovative curricula that provide consistently successful learning experiences and that have the following characteristics: integrated content, application to the world outside, and application to a broad base of student needs and abilities.
6. Provide the time and opportunity for you as teachers to observe one another as you practice new teaching strategies and curriculum.
7. See yourself as a part of a larger movement of teaching excellence and educational reform.

Reflection/Inquiry Question

What else would you add to this list of critical strategies of a successful program? Are these strategies achievable? If not then what?

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[Getting Started Questionnaire](#)

Toward the end of the training, take 15-20 minutes by yourself to answer these questions. Then, share your reflections with your team and begin the process of designing your next steps and plan for the year. Decide when you as a team will meet next. Debrief as a large group.

1. In what curricular areas can I integrate these concepts, skills, processes and values?
2. What are the curriculum standards that I will base my work on? What academic outcomes do I anticipate?
3. What behavioral outcomes do I anticipate?
4. What are the key areas I will focus on in the benchmark abilities list?
5. How will I let my students know about this new integration/infusion venture?
6. How will I involve my students in this new venture?
7. How and when can I involve the parents of my students in this project?
8. How important is it to meet with my teaching team? How often would I suggest meeting with them on this project?
9. What goals might we have as a teaching team?
10. How can I support my teaching team in this new venture?
11. How can I link this work to the greater community?
12. In what ways will I assess this new venture?

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Implementation Timeline

Year One/Stage One

1. Start by building trust, safety and belonging in your classroom community- without it students won't likely share true feelings and will likely try to disrupt, make fun of, dismiss or distort exercises which seek to deal with real feelings, needs and solutions.
2. Develop a list of classroom guidelines and rules that all can agree to and review.
3. Talk about developing community among the group and lay out for students the elements needed for a group to feel safe enough to trust and learn together. Discuss issues of respecting diversity and differences. Tie in classroom rules with the use of rules and laws in our society.
4. Introduce the basic elements of problem solving and the steps for resolving conflicts, solving problems and making decisions.
5. Tie in the elements of building trust, safety and belonging into the basic discussions of conflict and conflict resolution.
6. Introduce the basic elements of creating a multicultural society where differences are appreciated. Tie in the elements of respect, diversity and bias into the basic discussions of conflict and conflict resolution.
7. Integrate basic concepts in conflict resolution into the formal academic curriculum of one or more subject areas. Begin looking for ways to tie a lesson in one subject with a lesson from another-what is called parallel integration. Consider developing a multi-disciplinary, problem based unit.
8. Once students have passed the beginning stage of "skirting/scouting" and have entered the middle stage of "empowerment/intimacy," begin to introduce these more personal and sensitive topics, including personal issues of conflict, power, intimacy, trust and issues of prejudice and bias.
9. Discuss how laws help create order and cause conflict and protect and enforce civil and human rights. Discuss the concept and spectrum of appropriate dispute resolution processes. Bring up controversial issues, which show the intersection of laws and alternative dispute resolution processes.
10. Decide how much material needs to be repeated and reviewed from the past. Determine areas that still need more work.
11. Prepare students for the closing of the year.
12. Provide closure for students at the end of the year.

Year Two/Stage Two

1. Look at how you might help students better develop a sense of community based on last year's learnings. Engage students in the process of creating and monitoring a safe, productive and stimulating learning environment.
2. Review the basic problem solving steps at the beginning of the year and continue to integrate these steps and the basic concepts of problem solving into lesson content.
3. Once students have passed the beginning stage of group development (we call "skirt/scout") and have entered the second stage (we call

"empowerment/intimacy"), continue to work with more sensitive topics, such as harassment, power, bias and prejudice and victim-offender issues that deal with issues of injustice, harm and reconciliation.

4. Work more to develop a consistent lesson plan for your subject area and again see how your plan fits with other disciplines.
5. Work to integrate more complex and sensitive issues of bias awareness and prejudice reduction. Ask students to learn about and uncover sources of oppression. Maintain a safe environment to talk about sensitive issues. Debrief discussions for both content and process.
6. Start the work of curriculum mapping so the participating teachers can see the whole picture of where and when lessons are being taught across the disciplines.
7. Engage other teachers in the learning process. Invite them into your weekly or bi-weekly study groups.

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[Curriculum Mapping](#)

Discipline/ Month	Social Studies	Language Arts	Science	Math	Arts	Health
September						
October						
November						
December						
January						
February						
March						
April						
May						

Statements from Experts In Related Fields

[Social and Emotional Learning](#)

[How Does the Field of Social and Emotional Learning Contribute to a Successful Conflict Resolution Education Program?](#)

by Rachael Kessler
Director, Institute for Social and Emotional Learning

There are five ways that the concepts and tools developed in social and emotional learning can enhance the teaching of conflict resolution.

I. Working With Feelings

Even when conflict resolution training is reduced to its most simplistic form, it requires students to authentically express feelings. "When you do X, I feel Y," is a core building block of many conflict resolution education (CRE) programs. Learning the mechanics of a problem-solving sequence is not enough. Students will not be able to effectively carry out this step unless and until they can:

- recognize, identify and articulate their own feelings;
- trust that they are in a situation where it is safe to express feelings in a vulnerable way;
- listen to others with an open, non-reactive, non-defensive mind and heart.

Prior to introducing this model for mediation or conflict resolution, educators must have the tools for:

- creating a caring, respectful community in the classroom where it is safe to explore and express emotions and social concerns;
- give students, especially in the early grades, a series of experiences that help them identify, recognize and label feelings in themselves and others.
- exploring trust, mistrust, betrayal, reconciliation and forgiveness.

CRE seeks not just the teaching of mechanical problem solving tools but the fostering of resilience so that students have a rooted and balanced response to any challenge that comes their way will benefit from a broad social and emotional learning approach to resilience which includes fostering self-respect, belonging, self-awareness, playfulness and creativity, a bank of positive memories and compassion. These essential building blocks are provided by strategies from social and emotional learning.

II. Triggers

As students learn what triggers conflict and how to prevent or modulate these triggers to reduce or eliminate conflict situations, this process can be greatly enhanced by incorporating strategies from social and emotional learning. Some triggers include:

Stress and Grief:

social and emotional learning has extensive tools for helping students minimize stress and cope effectively with inevitable stress and loss so it does not become a trigger for violence.

Opposing Needs, Intolerance, Mistrust and Projection:

these can all be triggers for conflict for which social and emotional learning has

effective strategies for changing patterns of behavior.

For example, central to social and emotional learning are a variety of strategies which foster the development of multiple perspective taking, empathy and compassion which can cut through these triggers. Tools for self-awareness and self-expression also build the self-respect which make projection and intolerance less likely. Teaching older children about the dynamics of the "Shadow" and its role in projection (and the personal and political level) is also directly relevant to understanding the concept and reality of conflict triggers.

Impulsivity and Unmanaged Emotions:

these include and go beyond the above triggers and are also key triggers to conflict and violence. Social and emotional learning offers a variety of approaches for helping students manage destructive emotions, including providing ample opportunities for expressing the whole range of a person's emotions in constructive and respectful ways.

III. Understanding Group Development

Certain approaches to social and emotional learning can provide CRE teachers with an understanding of the stages of group development that can help teachers sequence lessons in the most effective way. These stages also relate to the building, maintenance and completion of a safe "container" for feelings, critical to repairing relationships and solving problems.

IV. Theory and Research

Recent work in social and emotional learning provides a language and rationale for understanding the need for CRE in the broadest possible way. For example, fostering "knowledge, responsibility and caring" (see below for detail) in students-the objectives stated in Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators -is as relevant to teaching CRE as social and emotional learning. Also relevant to CRE are research findings that demonstrate changed behavior when social and emotional learning programs are coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive in scope and over time. (See below for details on principles and methods.)

V. Teacher Development

Teacher training which includes a focus on the "teaching presence" is another way that social and emotional learning can enhance the effectiveness of teachers in CRE.

OBJECTIVES OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Knowledge

- motivation to learn
- focus, concentrate
- listen
- remember

- create meaningful connections
- multiple perspective taking
- critical thinking

Caring

- decision-making that reflects self-caring
- caring for others: empathy, compassion, citizenship, relationships
- belonging: being cared for by others
- appreciation for diversity

Responsibility Personal and Social

- health promotion and problem-prevention
- managing one's emotions
- taking multiple perspectives
- focused goals
- positive, contributory service

If these 3 inseparable objectives are achieved, we are preparing people who will:

- do no harm;
- create personal lives of meaning, health and satisfaction; and
- become effective citizens and leaders of a vital democracy.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING PROGRAMS

- Comprehensive and integrated: addressing common root causes
- Coordinated
- Full range of social and emotional issues
- Reinforced throughout curriculum and across grade levels in developmental sequence
- Caring, collaborative learning community:
- Modeling by faculty/staff/administrators/parents of skills, values and attitudes
- Student empowerment and collaboration
- Respecting and nurturing all domains of intelligence and diverse learning styles

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING: METHODS FOR THE CLASSROOM

Community Building Tools

- Collaborative ground rules process
- Collaborative problem-solving/decision making skills
- Class meetings/sharing circles/councils

Active and Experiential Learning Based on Multiple Intelligences

- Storytelling
- Role play

- Personal reflection and silence
- Goal setting
- Cooperative and small group learning
- Group dialogue
- Expressive arts
- Play

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Statements from Experts In Related Fields



[Diversity and Conflict Resolution](#)

Developing and Maintaining a Respectful School Environment

by Gayle Mertz

Director, Law Related Education Project

Conflict arises in all sectors of our public and private lives. How an individual or group views or addresses conflict is (at least in part) an outgrowth of the group or groups that they personally identify with; and the knowledge and assumptions they have about other groups. Diversity awareness and training intersects with conflict resolution training and practice in two important ways. First, overt and covert cultural conflict is increasingly prevalent in our schools and broader communities. Second, in situations where conflict unrelated to cultural identification or norms present themselves, cultural sophistication is required to legitimately resolve disputes between people, or groups, who do not share a common cultural orientation. For example, let's look at a simple situation which has the potential of leading to conflict and can be viewed from a variety of cultural perspectives: Several hundred students are leaving school at the end of the school day. Some are going directly home, others are waiting for school buses, and many of the students are just hanging out or playing on the playground. After talking to friends for a few minutes a student picks up his backpack and starts to walk off of the playground. A second student yells at him and accuses him of stealing the second student's backpack. The backpacks appear identical in shape, color, design, and condition.

A. Diversity and perceptions about diversity may negatively influence how the event is initially interpreted if the two students  or their peers  identify themselves as belonging to different groups.

- Negative stereotyping of a group of students may easily lead students to accuse the student walking away with the backpack of stealing based on their perception of the group that the student is a member of. The conflict then becomes focused on the identity of the student rather than the identification of the backpack.
- When innocently asked about whether he had the right backpack, the student leaving with the backpack might become overly defensive or confrontational due to existing (race, class, gender, cultural) tensions between the groups that the two backpack owners belong to. Again, the ensuing conflict is based on a group or personal identification instead of sorting out whether each student in fact has their own backpack, and if

not why.

- Even if the wrong backpack was mistakenly taken, the situation may be viewed as an act of harassment based on prior conflict between majority and minority groups within the school population. In this case the act may be perceived as having been initiated by either minority or majority group members. Again, the backpack mixup-or theft-may be used as a vehicle to escalate tension based on prejudice.

B. Even when the cultural identification of a person is not viewed as contributing to the development of a conflict, the ability to appropriately communicate with individuals from a group that you are not a member of can prevent, enhance or impede conflict resolution.

How each of these students identify themselves, and their membership in different groups will influence the role that they feel they must play in a conflict situation. i.e. 'I must be confrontational because my friends are watching and would expect that of me', or 'I must not engage in conversation with that person because of the expectations of my friends'.

Similarly, the knowledge or assumptions that one student has about the culture of the other student may contribute to escalating, or de-escalating, a conflict situation. i.e. 'I will suggest that we go get a teacher, peer mediator, or bilingual assistant to help us determine who owns which backpack', or 'I can easily intimidate this person because I have noticed that members of their group are very quiet and submissive'.

The scenario above examines dynamics that may apply at an airport where travelers are picking up luggage, or a retail store where a customer may intentionally-on unintentionally pick up the wrong package and start to leave the store. Research shows that when the individuals involved look similar and can easily identify with one another the situation is resolved more easily, and with greater civility, than when the individuals involved view themselves as belonging to different groups, or cultures. In situations where the parties are dissimilar it is more likely to be viewed as a conflict rather than an innocent mistake between similar parties.

How Does Curriculum Influence Our Understanding of the Role of Diversity in Creating and Resolving Conflict?

While strides are being made to revise and delete overt racial, cultural, and gender biases in curricula there is still a great deal of work to be done. A common practice in exploring conflict places focus on cultural, racial and gender conflict in situations which have not been easily remedied. Social, political or economic perspectives which contribute equally to conflict are not routinely framed in as adversarial a context. Conflict resolution strategies are not often highlighted. For example, below is a section of the revised 'Social Studies Proficiencies for Excellence' adopted in 1997 by a large Western school district:

Civic Ideals and Functions

Students will examine the ideals, purposes and characteristics of governmental systems to identify how people organize and govern themselves and to demonstrate the role of a citizen.

Instructional Content

Students' instructional experiences in fourth grade will include exposure to topics listed and in depth study of selected topics:

- State territory and statehood
- Native American conflict with settlers and early state governments
- Cities, towns, counties
- State Government (3 branches)

Executive Branch (Enforces Laws)
Governor, State Patrol

Legislative Branch (Writes Laws)
Senate, House of Representatives

Judicial Branch (Upholds Laws)
Courts

Notice that only Native American relationships with settlers and early state government are framed as conflict. Conflict within early state governments and between settlers and early governments are not framed in that context. The conflicting interplay between the three branches of government is not mentioned, nor is the role of each branch of government in addressing conflict. Conflict that is not based on race or ethnicity (i.e. ranchers, farmers and the railroads) is not identified in key content concepts. Notice also that the exploration of how people organize, govern themselves and demonstrate the role of a citizen does not appear to include Native American tribes or their members. While the above analysis may seem overly sensitive, it points out how subtleties lay a foundation for reinforcing negative stereotypes and over emphasizes the relationship between diversity and conflict. Would a teacher approach instruction differently is the content was stated like this?:

- Conflict between the territory and proponents of statehood
- Settlers and early states governments conflict with Native Americans
- Conflicts between cities, towns and counties
- Constitutional conflicts between the three branches of government
- How each branch of government serves the public by addressing conflict.

or:

- How territory supporters resolved conflict with statehood proponents
- How settlers and Native Americans learned about each others' culture and used that knowledge to reduce conflict

- How cities, towns, and counties learned to work together
- How the constitution provides a framework for resolving differences between the three branches of government
- How each branch of government serves the public by addressing conflict.

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Statements from Experts In Related Fields

[Anti-Bias Education](#)

How Does the Field of Anti-Bias Education Contribute to a Successful Conflict Resolution Education Program?

by Pamela Moore

Project Consultant

We need anti-bias education as part of our education curriculum because behaviors associated with prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, and scapegoating are expressed in all aspects of our society.

Each teacher and student brings to school his or her own set of values, beliefs, attitudes, points of view, cultural norms and social needs. They also bring conscious and unconscious beliefs and attitudes about others including stereotypes and prejudices. According to the American Psychological Association report, "Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response" (1993), "prejudice and discrimination are not a thing of the past it is also enacted in countless acts of interpersonal behavior each day. It also damages the self-confidence and self-esteem of those discriminated against and lays a foundation for anger, discontent and violence." All too often, adults in educational settings downplay or ignore the overt and subtle acts of prejudice that cause anguish and conflict among youth. Failure to provide concrete mechanisms that enhance respect for cultural diversity and combat individual and institutional acts of bigotry and discrimination inadvertently give the impression that these societal ills are nonexistent, unimportant or not worth addressing.

Ideally, the educational experience should include the opportunity to explore and learn to effectively respond to intercultural and interpersonal differences. Conflict resolution practitioners in particular should incorporate anti-bias education into their skill set because prejudice and discrimination may be underlying causes for inappropriate and conflictual behaviors. Conflict resolution practitioners need to be able to recognize the impact that prejudice and discrimination (overt or subtle) have on individuals and the school community.

While every conflict between and among groups may not have an element of prejudice or stereotyping as an underlying cause, only a knowledgeable conflict resolution practitioner can determine when these factors are inherent in the conflict. If these factors are not addressed, the potential for reconciliation is not fully realized. Additionally, there is often a real sense of discomfort when people discuss issues of prejudice and discrimination; therefore the parties may be

unwilling to name these factors even when it is obvious that they are causing a conflict. A skilled conflict resolution practitioner can facilitate discussions that help people to identify, address and move beyond these barriers to develop effective interpersonal and intergroup relationships.

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Statements from Experts In Related Fields

[Diversity and Conflict Resolution](#)

Integrating Diversity and Conflict Resolution into Curriculum

Gayle Mertz

Director, Law Related Education Network

Diversity training often includes material and exercises which teach about the characteristics and history of specific groups of people. Understanding the history, customs, beliefs, values, and social structure of a group helps prevent conflict and enhances bridge building between groups and individuals. While, by necessity, it often generalizes about a large group of people, or groups of people, it provides guidelines for avoiding insulting behavior or taboos and teaches basic cultural etiquette. Diversity training focuses on including the perspectives of dominant and subordinate (minority-majority) cultural groups without focusing on simple good guy-bad guy or winner-looser labels. It promotes perspective taking, critical thinking, and introspection.

Conflict resolution training focuses on skill building. Students are taught a series of steps which can identify, name and resolve conflict. They are given the opportunity to practice and model techniques and apply them in a variety of situations. Conflict resolution training generally focuses on conflict between two- or a small group of people. Increasingly educators are using history and literature to help students analyze how real or fictional characters create, avoid, and address conflict. This practice integrates basic components of diversity training and helps students apply historic or fictional experience to their everyday life. It expands conflict resolution training to include additional disciplines and brings breath and depth to a single discipline.

The process of integrating these two disciplines draws on the overlapping benefits of each approach. By expanding understanding of individuals and groups that are we are unfamiliar with we are able to build more harmonious communities without forcing anyone to abandon their own culture, belief systems, or values. Effective diversity training reduces cultural ignorance and intolerance. Conflict resolution training fosters the ability of all members of a community to address conflict whether it is based on cultural conflict or completely unrelated to culture. Each discipline engages in similar training practices: role playing, active listening, perspective taking and shares similar goals valuing diversity, community building, and violence reduction. Together they provide an efficient approach to enhancing school climate and academics.

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Law Related Education/ Civic Education

How Does the Field of Law Related Education/Civic Education Contribute to a Successful Conflict Resolution Education Program?

by **Gayle Mertz**

Director, Law Related Education Network

Laws and rules are created to prevent and resolve conflict. Law-related education (LRE) is an interactive educational approach which guides people in exploring the foundations, history and applications of law. Like mediation, social-emotional learning and diversity training, LRE helps us understand and define the boundaries of socially acceptable behavior. It focuses on helping students to develop sensitivity to dynamics which create conflict, to learn intervention skills which prevent the escalation of conflict, and to understand how law enforcement and other methods are applied in resolving conflict or the consequences of that conflict.

Law-related education 'best practices' include integrating curriculum with a wide variety of disciplines. In this respect it shares the goals of each of the above disciplines by increasing academic performance and forging participatory citizenship skills. As our formal legal system moves toward greater institutionalization of alternative dispute resolution methods, the marriage of mediation and law-related education becomes more meaningful. The methods, content and goals of each of these two disciplines compliment one another in a variety of ways. They are easily integrated into middle level curriculum, apply goals of improving school climates and support the academic goals of school reform. In short, Law-related education adds depth and breadth to the National Curriculum Integration Project.

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