

Learning conflict resolution skills

Overall evaluation of programmes delivered in the cluster (October 2010 to January 2011)

<p>This project aims to deliver and evaluate four programmes (of six sessions) teaching year three pupils conflict resolution skills</p>
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Project purpose

To ensure that year 3 pupils have the skills to enable them to resolve conflict effectively.

Why this age

Developmentally children under 8 are capable of understanding simple processes of conflict resolution, and there is evidence that these simple foundations have to be learnt, before more complex levels can be grappled with. There is also evidence to suggest that these are not skills that are on the whole learnt naturally, unless they are regularly reinforced.

A common difficulty for teachers is that their primary focus is of course on whole class learning, which means that conflict is usually resolved as quickly as possible, whereas the learning of conflict resolution skills often require a focus on both the conflict itself and the process of resolution. Even if teachers recognise the importance of this they do not usually have the time to focus on children's learning of these skills.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes for this project were as follows:

Outcomes for the pupils:

1. Increased understanding of conflict, how it starts and how it can be dealt with effectively;
2. A set of skills that will enable them to deal with conflict in and outside of school;
3. Increased confidence and safety within the school environment;
4. Increased understanding of concepts and strategies in conflict resolution.

Outcomes for the schools will be:

1. A reduction in conflict within the school generally and the playground in particular and pupils able to resolve conflicts;
2. Pupils being more focused on their classroom work and less on playground matters.

Where we delivered programmes

This final evaluation is based on the delivery of four programmes in the collaborative [1]:

xxxxxx Primary	year 4 [2]	January 11
xxxxxx Primary	year 3	January 11
xxxxxxxxxxxxxx	year 3	September / October 10
xxxxxx Primary	year 3	January 11

(1) xxxxxxxxx were offered the programme, but requested that they had more of the 'Home to School' project instead.

(2) xxxxxxxxx requested the programme was delivered to year 4, as they believed it would be more beneficial to that class.

Programme sessions delivered

While content varied and sessions moved at a different speed the following reflects the themes for all four of the programmes. Each session lasted an hour and there were two sessions a week.

Session 1 - what is fair? What is unfair? Including practical exercises that enabled pupils to reflect and understand what is fair.

Session 2 – more on fairness and then moving onto what causes conflict? Examples generated from the pupils experience. End of the class to be able to identify what is conflict? Role-playing and discussion about three techniques 'telling teacher', 'ignore' and 'butter-up'.

Session 3 – pupils were asked to try the techniques and we started with some examples. We did more role-play out and adding three more techniques 'negotiate', 'make laugh' and 'talk it through'. We also looked at what made matters worse and what makes them better, as well as body language.

Session 4 – again examples of using the techniques (mainly ‘tell parent’ and ‘ignore’) and the rest of the session we concentrated on body language, face, tone, words and eyes.

Session 5 – more examples given of techniques they had tried and what makes matters better. We concentrated on the person who started the conflict, looking at motivation, a good range of examples such as to annoy, tease, bully, make angry, get a reaction. Looked at having a truce in the classroom and then carried out a quiz to gauge levels of learning.

Session 6 – introduction of a process of resolving conflict and of a problem solver job, particularly making sure that the real problem is identified. There was also a written quiz which was used as an evaluation of the sessions.

Comments from the class teacher (each school has been allocated a number, so you can identify individual schools comments. School C was the first to be delivered and a formal evaluation form was not developed until the second programme)

What benefits do you think there were for your class in this programme?

“The children loved the opportunity to role play and improvise situations” (A).

“The children had the opportunity to discuss and deal with incidents and problems that they faced during the week” (A).

“The children learned some constructive ways to deal with any conflicts that may arise” (A).

“To understand some of the problems they had were being made worse by the original problem not being resolved quickly and effectively (B)”.

“Children know there are a number of ways of solving a problem (B)”.

“Many children have realised that conflicts were making them unhappy and were causing them to get into unnecessary problems when they could easily be resolved with a range of tools (B) ”.

“Pupils enjoyed the sessions, and they liked talking about themselves. They also really liked the role plays and active parts of the sessions (C)”.

“Able to consider what’s fair and unfair (D)”.

“Recognise situation where conflict occurs (D)”.

"Able to role-play scenarios (D)".

What do you think the class learnt through the sessions?

"The class seem to be trying to deal with conflicts themselves more, rather than coming straight to the teacher" (A).

"The class learned some language to use to try and solve conflicts" (A).

"The class learned some strategies to use to deal with conflicts" (A).

"How to interact with each other to solve problems" (B).

"Not all problems need adult intervention" (B).

"More of an understanding about fair and unfair" (B).

"Most of the pupils understood the basic concepts and they had been able to use the learning when conflict in the class had arisen (although there has not been that much) (C)".

"The themes discussed have enabled them to engage with issues related to conflict and fairness, and while there have been exceptions, most have been able to understand a range of issues related to fairness and conflict in the classroom (C)".

"Strategies to resolve conflict (D)".

"Vocabulary that can be used (D)".

"Reading body language / facial expression (D)".

What proportion of the class do you think learnt the above?

"I think that a lot of the children grasped the material in theory, but may struggle to put it into practice" (A).

"All of the children have enjoyed the session some children are taking longer to adjust to the problem solver (B)".

What have you noticed them being able to put into practice?

"Before the 'problem solver role' was introduced very few children were putting their learning into practice. Since having a class problem solver I have seen a

few more children trying to use the strategies, but I think it may take a lot more time and constant discussion and reminders until it is widely put into practise by the children” (A).

“The children have been using the problem solver and it has relieved any problems. The children have also realised that some of the conflicts they were having were unnecessary and were just wasting their time (B)”.

“They are able to resolve conflict between themselves more rather than involving an adult (D)”.

“They are able to recognise when in the wrong due to new vocabulary learnt (D)”

Has it helped provide a language for conflict resolution?

“The problem solver card is very useful as the children can refer to it to see exactly what language they should use” (A).

“YES a poster has been displayed in the classroom, listing the strategies as a reminder (D)”.

Has it helped you resolve conflict?

“In some cases. I think it is hard to tell how effective it has been at this point as I feel that the children need more time and reminders to use the strategies that they have learned and to use them effectively” (A).

“It needs to be regularly reinforced so the children use the correct language (D)”.

Has the Problem Solver role worked?

“YES, It is starting to (very much depends on which child is the problem solver!) (A)”

“YES, children are talking through their problems with the problem solver and the adult are not being brought into the situation unless very necessary (B)”.

“The class will have a ‘conflict solver’ rota after half term and we will use this as one of the guides as to whether learning has been applied by the pupils (C)”.

"It did initially, but the school has since started a 'peer mediator' scheme in which year 6 children provide this role in the playground (D)".

Has the problem solver role consolidated any learning? "YES"

"It is starting to" (A).

What would have made it better?

"Children need more time and constant reinforcement to learn how to use the strategies effectively" (A).

"Some children struggled to sustain concentration for the entire session. Perhaps some more practical activities would have benefited them" (A).

"I think the material could have been condensed into four sessions, rather than six. I think the children would have learnt the same amount in this time scale (D)".

Anything else?

"A great programme that has been very helpful there are lots of issues which are now being resolved without any outbursts or time wasting (B)".

Comments from the pupils included:

"Because he teaches you to calm down (A)"

"They were funny and enjoyable (A)"

"I liked the sessions with Mr Lloyd because he talked about stuff than happens at school and let everyone have a chance to speak (A)"

"You can say stuff that can't tell no one else, he's great fun acting (A)"

"I liked the sessions, it can help with life (A)"

"I liked the acting parts, the worksheets and listening to answers (A)"

"That when I get angry, Mr Lloyd teached me that I should calm down (A)"

"They are really fun, interesting, I loved the acting and learnt loads of things (A)"

"I well liked the discussions (B)"

"He teaches us not to make stuff worse (B)"

"I liked everything like the conflict and role play (B)"

"Everything, role play and discussions, because it's fun and you could learn from them (B)"

"He helped us act out and he helped us sort out problems (B)"

"The plays were fun (C)".

"That we can ask and I enjoyed them" (C).

"When we sort out problems (C)".

"We got to act and I liked it when we got to act and it was funny (D)"

"Acting and stuff, conflict and helping sort out conflict (D)"

"We got to do acting, hard work and quizzes (D)"

"It was really, really interesting (D)"

"I liked the sessions because everybody got to go up to the front and act and sort out conflict (D)"

"We got to do acting (D)"

"I liked it when we went up and worked out how to sort things out (D)"

Have the expected outcomes been achieved?

Outcomes for the pupils:

1. Increased understanding of conflict, how it starts and how it can be dealt with effectively.

For most of the pupils this outcome was achieved.

2. A set of skills that will enable them to deal with conflict in and outside of school.

Pupils were asked to use the skills and a number reported back (especially in relation to brothers and sisters), although I would expect this to take a little longer to embed.

3. Increased confidence and safety within the school environment.

Most of the examples of conflict highlighted by the pupils within school were verbal in nature. So safety is less of an issue, but there was some evidence in the reporting back and evaluation quiz that pupils were more confident in their approach to conflict resolution.

4. Increased understanding of concepts and strategies in conflict resolution.

The evaluation quiz and comments from the classroom teacher suggest that the concepts were understood and remain a work in progress. The teachers have been quick to use the concepts and terminology highlighted in the programme sessions and in three of the schools they have enthusiastically taken to the 'problem solver' role.

Outcomes for the schools will be:

1. A reduction in conflict within the school generally and the playground in particular and pupils able to resolve conflicts.

Too early to say, we will have to wait until the 'problem solver' role has been in operation for a few weeks and review then. However, two of the teachers suggested they had seen a change in the way children reacted to each other (friendlier and softer).

2. Pupils being more focused on their classroom work and less on playground matters.

As 1 above.

Conclusions

1. The children responded very well to the sessions and the way it was delivered. They enjoyed acting out scenario's and the opportunity to give their experience and views.

2. The classes had some real characters, the majority were strong communicators and they enjoyed expressing themselves verbally.

3. They were very keen to read and get involved in acting out the scenario's, with some disappointment for those not involved in the reading and acting.

4. Most of the classes understood the core concepts, especially in terms of 'making matters better or worse', and a number of the techniques. Some pupils found it more difficult to understand the differences in tone, voice and body language. The emotional content involved in some conflict was recognised as more difficult to control, both for those involved in the conflict and the problem solver.

5. The classroom teachers have found they have been able to use the concepts and meaning (such as fairness) to help resolve classroom issues between pupils and this is an area that could be further developed.

6. Overall, the programme was well received by the pupils, by far the majority understood the basic concepts and at least some had put these into practice. The follow-up evaluation will give a much better indicator of how pupils have used this understanding.

7. The problem solver role appears to work well as a way of consolidating learning. Brief follow-ups suggest this is an important part of ensuring programme learning is reinforced, and programme language is used.

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March 2011.

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