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## The development of conflict resolution skills in kindergarten

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## The development of conflict resolution skills in kindergarten

### Abstract

An issue facing schools and educators today is that of children being desensitized to violence because of their many contact hours with the media (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). Media becomes a powerful tool in the socialization process, when children are constantly exposed to the idea that violence is an acceptable and effective method of solving problems. When children are exposed to violent models for conflict resolution, whether firsthand or through the media, this becomes part of their repertoire of developed responses to conflict. Building on these responses, more violence is fostered. Other positive social responses that should be part of the child's developing social cognition, are crowded out.

**The Development of Conflict Resolution  
Skills in Kindergarten**

**A Graduate Research Paper**

**Submitted to the**

**Division of Early Childhood Education**

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**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

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**by**

**Pamela Goschke**

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## Table of Contents

	Page
<b>CHAPTER I - The Problem</b> .....	1
History .....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	2
Need for the Study .....	3
Limitations .....	3
Definition of Terms .....	3
<b>CHAPTER II - Review of the Literature</b> .....	6
Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum .....	6
Meeting Instructional Standards .....	7
Developing Specific Skills Needed in Conflict Resolution .....	9
Summary .....	12
<b>CHAPTER III - Procedure</b> .....	13
Setting .....	13
Social Forces and Influences .....	13
Classroom Environment .....	13
Goals .....	14
Classroom Surveys .....	14
Content of the Curriculum .....	15

Evaluation .....	18
<b>CHAPTER IV - Results .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Developmentally Appropriate .....	20
Meeting Instructional Standards .....	24
Developing Specific Skills Needed in Conflict Resolution .....	35
<b>CHAPTER V - Summary .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Recommendations .....	32
Conclusions .....	33
References .....	35
Appendix A - Parent Letter .....	38
Appendix B - Parent Questionnaire .....	40
Appendix C - Student Questionnaire .....	43
Appendix D - I-Message .....	45
Appendix E - I Feelings .....	47
Appendix F - Ground Rules .....	49
Appendix G - How to Talk It Out .....	51
Appendix H - Parent Letter .....	53
Appendix I - Table 1 .....	55

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

An issue facing schools and educators today is that of children being desensitized to violence because of their many contact hours with the media (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992). Media becomes a powerful tool in the socialization process, when children are constantly exposed to the idea that violence is an acceptable and effective method of solving problems. When children are exposed to violent models for conflict resolution, whether firsthand or through the media, this becomes part of their repertoire of developed responses to conflict. Building on these responses, more violence is fostered. Other positive social responses that should be part of the child's developing social cognition, are crowded out.

### History

The implementation of conflict resolution in the schools is relatively new. The Quakers were first to make a serious effort to introduce conflict resolution into schools. The Children's Creative Response to Conflict (CCRC) Program began in 1972 as a project of the New York Friends Meeting. Working with inner-city children in New York, CCRC developed an approach that used puppetry, games, music, and discussion to improve children's skills in cooperation and conflict resolution (Roderick, 1988).

Two developments in 1982 broadened the work begun by CCRC. The Community Board Center for Policy and Training in San Francisco, and community mediation program started the School Initiatives Program which introduced a model for student mediation programs that could be replicated around the country (Roderick, 1988).

The School Initiatives Program involves the use of peer mediators, normally practiced in upper elementary and beyond. From the success of this program, the San Francisco Community Board Program solicited the help of Barbara Porro, a lower elementary classroom teacher to develop conflict resolution skill for young children, kindergarten through third grade (Porro, 1992).

#### Purpose of the Study

This paper will present the results of a study which implemented a method of instruction which allowed children to develop strategies for conflict resolution. This curriculum provided specific skills that helped children learn a broader repertoire for resolving their conflicts. Specifically, the following questions were investigated.

1. Is this conflict resolution curriculum developmentally appropriate?
2. Does the curriculum coincide with mandated instructional standards?
3. Will children who are taught the curriculum develop specific skills to resolve personal conflicts?



### Need for the Study

There is an obvious need for people with greater peacemaking skills in a society that is pervaded by violence. Teachers, perhaps more than anyone else, see the effects of this violence on children and in their behavior. A classroom atmosphere charged with bad feelings, lack of trust, and unresolved or suppressed conflicts is not conducive to learning (Kreidler, 1984). The study is designed to implement some strategies designed to alleviate these problems to see if this result could be achieved.

### Limitations

Broad generalizations to other populations cannot be made from this study because of the following limitations. In reviewing the literature, the researcher located no negative results from the use of conflict resolution. As this research was intended to be an actio research, there was a limited sample and no control group involved.

### Definition of Terms

To have a common understanding of the material, it will be helpful to define the following terms:

#### Conflict Resolution

A complex skill built upon practice and mastery of simpler communication skills. The ability to interact requires awareness of others, awareness of the

distinction between self and others, the desire to connect with others, awareness of others' feelings, skills in listening, and the ability to respond (Nattiv, Render, Lemire, & Render, 1989).

### Developmentally Appropriate

A framework, a philosophy, or an approach to working with young children that requires the adult to pay attention to how children develop and learn, and how the individual needs and interests of each child in the group can be met (Bredekamp and Rosegrant, 1992),

### Strategies

Cognitive skills the children must construct in order to deal with a conflict or participate in conflict resolution.

### Mandated Instructional Standards

The Iowa Code addresses state-mandated expectations of kindergarten programs:

The kindergarten program shall include experiences designed to develop healthy emotional and social habits and growth in the language arts and communication skills, as well as a capacity for the completion of individual tasks, and protect and increase physical well-being with attention given to experiences relating to the development of life skills and human growth and development (p. 1942).

### Whole-Child Programs

Curriculum that attends to the whole child by calling for content goals to address all domains; social, emotional, cognitive, and physical. The goal is to help children achieve optimum developmental potential so as to be fully prepared to participate as citizens of a democracy (Bredenkamp & Rosegrant, 1992).

### The Primary Program: Growing and Learning in the Heartland

A joint project of the Nebraska Department of Education, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Area Education Agencies, and Head Start-State Collaboration Project, to provide a coherent framework to guide local planning for reform of educational programs in the kindergarten/primary level of schooling.

### Mediator

In using conflict resolution with young children, the teacher becomes the mediator. The role of the mediator is to do the following: Acknowledge feelings without value judgement; help children define the problem in concrete terms for their two points of view; focus children on coming up with positive solution; help them see how solutions would work, bringing in both points of view; help them to agree to one position solution; help them put their plan into practice; and provide an opportunity to evaluate (Carlsson-Paige & Levin, 1992).

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

A review of the literature will provide a focus to the problem of conflict in children's lives. The review will focus on (a) developmentally appropriate curriculum, (b) mandated instructional standards, and (c) specific social skills needed to resolve personal conflicts.

#### Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum

In a quality kindergarten program, children are provided many learning experiences where they are actively involved in the environment. The work of Jean Piaget's constructivist theory demonstrates that knowledge evolves through the internal process of inventing understanding (Britz & Richard, 1992). Children must be allowed the opportunity to internalize their feelings and construct strategies to deal with them. In outlining appropriate practices for the guidance of social-emotional development, the National Association for the Education of Young Children has stated that:

Teachers facilitate the development of self-control in children in using positive guidance techniques such as modeling and encouraging expected behavior, redirecting children to a more acceptable activity, and setting clear limits. Teachers' expectations match and respect children's developing capabilities (Bredekamp, 1987 p. 73).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children also outlines

inappropriate teaching practices for the guidance of social-emotional development. Bredekamp (1987) has stated that, "Teachings spend a great deal of time enforcing rules, punishing unacceptable behavior, demeaning children who misbehave, making children sit and be quiet, or refereeing disagreements" (p. 73). Conflict resolution in the classroom allows the classroom teacher to conform with the appropriate teaching practices, thus allowing the child the opportunity to develop positive social skills.

Williams and Kamii (1986) described three ways to encourage children to develop problem solving skills with developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. The first strategy is to connect classroom activities with what is personally meaningful to the children. A second way to encourage problem solving is to provide opportunities for children to make decisions. The third way is to encourage children to work together to solve problems.

A method of instruction used in this study to resolve conflicts employed these aspects of a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Activities were designed specifically to teach the strategies necessary for conflict resolution.

#### Meeting Instructional Standards

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (1990) offers guidelines for school districts to establish quality education programs for young children. In focusing on instructional standards relevant to the teaching of conflict

resolution, these are their standards of quality early childhood programs:

**Develop a positive self-image; enhance social and emotional development; expand early concepts; encourage independent thinking; develop problem-solving skill; improve all communication skills; stimulate interest in the natural world; increase the child's capability for self-discipline; advance the development of fundamental motor skills and abilities; identify specific individual mental, social, emotional, or physical needs; further the development of aesthetic appreciation and expression; encourage creativity; give and receive sincere affection. (NAESP, 1990, p.2)**

In applying these standards, many educators feel vulnerable to the criticism that teaching conflict resolution and addressing interpersonal skills, fall into the category of the social curriculum and are, therefore not legitimate content areas for schools which should focus on the academics (Nattiv, Render, Lemire, & Render, 1989). but when an integrated curriculum is used, as endorsed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1987), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (1990), affective/social goals are included under the scope and sequence for democracy and citizenship for most school districts. Because the learning process is an integrated one that does not artificially separate cognitive and affective components, interpersonal skill development is a valid component for instruction (Nattiv, et al, 1990). Children learn about the democratic process when they help determine what rules they need to get along together, make real choices, and accept responsibility for their own actions

(Peck, McCraig, & Sapp, 1988). These whole-child programs encourage children to solve problems by talking about them with the other people involved.

### Developing Specific Skills Need in Conflict Resolution

Education for democracy requires that students feel connected to each other and to society and that they learn to be compassionate, cooperative, and responsible for their actions (Ross & Rogers, 1990). In addition, to helping children learn how to negotiate successful relationships with others, developing social competence is also important in helping children learn how to live in a democratic society. The curriculum of conflict resolution fulfills the components of the transformational resolution fulfills the components of the transformational curriculum, emphasizing the value of developing the whole child.

As previously stated, quality early childhood curriculum should be (1) developmentally appropriate, (2) implemented through an integrated approach to develop the whole child, and (3) to develop the social competence of the child. All too often programs are concerned solely with the intellectual growth of the child, emphasizing academics to reach high test scores and greater achievement. In a review of research on peer interaction, a common thread appeared; that positive peer interaction is a positive predictor of school achievement (Ironsmith & Poteat, 1990; Ladd, 1990; Pellegrini, 1992; Vitaro, Gagnon, & Tremblay, 1990, 1992). Consistent

in this research is the fact that early peer rejection is a stressor in the school environment and, therefore, interferes with subsequent school achievement. Early peer rejection predicts less favorable school attitudes, increasing school avoidance, and lower levels of performance over the course of kindergarten (Pellegrini, 1992).

Ladd and Mize (1983) have demonstrated "that children may be taught specific social skills by (a) presenting knowledge of effective and appropriate social strategies, (b) providing opportunities to gain proficiency in performing these, and (c) giving feedback on the impact of these behaviors on others" (p. 130). The specific skills outlined by Ladd and Mize are necessary strategies children need to construct in order to participate in conflict resolution.

Children develop an understanding of conflict and how to resolve it through a long slow process of construction (Carlsson-Paige, & Levin, 1992). They first must be introduced to the elements of conflict resolution which are: Defining the problem, brainstorming possible solutions, using negotiation skills and choosing solutions that satisfy both sides.

Carlsson-Paige & Levin (1992) have developed guidelines for teacher to use to teach specific skills:

**Defining the problem: Guideline 1.**

Teachers can help children understand the problems that cause their conflicts in



terms that make sense to them. For young children this means helping them define their problems in terms of physical objects and concrete actions.

**Defining the problem: Guideline 2.**

Teaching can help children see that their problems have two sides. While it is difficult for young children to do this on their own, the teacher can show them the two viewpoints in the immediate context of the problem they are having.

**Defining the problem: Guideline 3.**

Teachers can help children see the whole problem and how their behavior contributed to it.

**Learning about solutions: Guideline 1**

Teachers can help children think of winning solutions when they have a hard time coming up with their own.

**Learning about solutions: Guideline 2**

Teachers can suggest winning solutions that recast the situation in some creative way to include children's joint participation.

**Learning about solutions: Guideline 3**

Children should have many opportunities to explore what happens in conflicts in which one or both participants lose.

Learning to negotiate: Guideline 1

From an early age, no matter what developmental skills children have, one of the most important things we can do is instill in them a sense of empowerment that they can do things to create more positive social relationships.

Summary

This literature review confirmed these statements:

1. Conflict resolution strategies can be included in the developmentally appropriate curriculum. The child can be provided opportunities to understand and construct knowledge necessary for conflict resolution.
2. Conflict resolution strategies can be fully integrated into the mandated instructional standards. A goal of a democratic society is to have citizens display responsibility for their own actions, and the ability to negotiate successful relationships.
3. Conflict resolution strategies can enhance specific skills needed to resolve personal conflicts. Like all new learning, conflict resolution skills must be practiced in a wide range of social interactions if they are to be meaningfully learned.

## Chapter III

### Procedure

This study was undertaken to determine if children who are taught the strategies of conflict resolution, will develop skills they can use in resolving their own conflicts. When teachers help disputing children talk it out rather than withdraw or fight it out, children eventually become independent problem solvers.

#### Setting

A kindergarten classroom in a small eastern Iowa school district was chosen for this study. With the consent and support of the local administration and AEA, conflict resolution strategies were implemented in a classroom setting with 25 kindergarten students and one classroom teacher.

#### Social Forces and Influences

The children ranged in age from 5 to 7 years of age in an all-day program. The class was almost half of each sex and ranged in abilities from high to low. Many of the children had attended the district provided preschool and were familiar with the facility and their peers.

#### Classroom Environment

In dealing with conflict resolution, the classroom teacher looked at what was causing conflicts in the classroom. The more the teacher became aware of conflict

situations, the better prepared that teacher was to deal with these problems. Conflict resolution does not try to eliminate classroom conflict. The aim is to reduce conflict and help the students deal more effectively and constructively when conflicts do occur.

### Goals

The following goals of the conflict resolution curriculum were selected. One, to give children opportunities for increasing competence, and self-confidence. Two, to foster understanding and tolerance for differences. Three, to teach children to express and value their own feelings and the feelings of others. Four, to teach children to resolve conflict in a nonviolent manner. Five, to provide children with experiences that demonstrate the multiplicity of solutions to a problem. These five goals support and enable children to reach one of the main goals of the kindergarten program, for the children to become productive citizens, and were selected for that reason.

### Classroom Surveys

Following research approval from the local administration, the parents of the kindergarten children were informed of the conflict resolution curriculum implementation (Appendix A). They were also sent a parent survey that asked them to assess their own child's social knowledge. The survey focused on three areas,

responsibility, problem solving, and interaction skills (Appendix B).

Concurrently the classroom teacher developed a student interview that was administrated individually (Appendix C). The questions focused on situations that would evoke a variety of responses. The conflicts included physical and verbal actions.

### Content of the Curriculum

In order to teach the skills needed for conflict resolution, several concepts need to be introduced. Conflicts that occur in the classroom are seen as natural opportunities for children to practice resolution skills. Bringing the children to a common understanding and usage of all the strategies is important.

The first step is to define conflict and introduce the three different ways conflict is normally dealt with. These three reactions are to ignore it (denial), to fight it out (confrontation), and to talk it out (problem solving). A story with three different endings is used to show the difference in each reaction. The lesson promotes the consequences of talking it out, which becomes the focus of further instruction.

Teaching the children that they must stop and cool off before they react is the first step in conflict resolution. Techniques that calm the child allows them to think clearly and react more calmly in a conflict situation. A variety of calming techniques can be practiced. Teaching the children techniques such as counting to 10, deep

breathing, draining and ballooning (Kreidler, 1984) will help them internalize these skills. As with all these strategies, opportunities to practice and use the calming techniques need to be provided, and the teacher needs to provide guidance until the children are able to utilize the skill in a natural manner.

Of all the skills needed for conflict resolution, the ability to communicate clearly is one of the most important. Both expressive and receptive communication must be taught. After the child has cooled off, it is important to talk about the problem. The child must tell the other person what is bothering them and how their actions have affected them. Then they must find out how the other person is feeling. This strategy is the I-message, which tells the other person how their action has affected them (Appendix D). In using I-messages, blame which normally intensifies the conflict is removed. During this part of conflict resolution training, much emphasis is placed on feelings. Children need to focus on what types of feelings they are experiencing during conflict, and in later stages of their strategy development, how the other party is feeling (Appendix E).

Children may have difficulty focusing on the person talking to them. In developing receptive language skills it is helpful to move to a place with fewer distractions. The establishment of a conflict corner or private area is useful in conflict resolution. Role playing in good listening skills is appropriate. It is

especially challenging and important to be a good listener in conflict situations. In the midst of anger and frustration it is difficult to listen when there is disagreement. Instead of listening, there is a strong tendency to mentally prepare a defense and to interrupt. Basic ground rules help the children remember their roles in the conflict corner (Appendix F). A strategy to help with the problem of listening and not interrupting is to use a "talking stick," a baton or microphone, which allows the person holding the stick to do the speaking. This physically shows the expressive and receptive dialogue involved in an active conversation.

Conflict typically is a clash of two people with a mutual problem. At this point both children will be able to tell their side of the problem, and how the actions have affected them. Now there is a need to negotiate a common solution. Brainstorming techniques are taught to the children through class practice and teacher modeling. The children then choose the solution that satisfies both parties. This can be difficult for children to manage without adult interaction. As with the other skills, much practice needs to be done with this strategy. Group discussions, recalling previous solutions, as well as story telling help the reluctant problem solver begin to accept the negotiation aspect of conflict resolution.

Respect and empathy for peers is stressed in the final strategy. The ability to understand and accept another individual's view is a very advanced skill. In

affirmation of a conflict resolution plan, children do just this. This strategy gives the child ownership of both the problem and the solution. The teacher can use this point as a review of resolution. In asking the children to discuss their plan they have empowered the children to solve their own problems and to recognize their success (Appendix G).

The curriculum perceives the teacher as the key change agent, training all the students in negotiating skills. The teacher provides the children the outline of strategies to be used in facilitating negotiation when classroom conflict occurs. The teacher's goal is to move students toward greater skill and independence so that the students can eventually negotiate agreements without the help of a third person. The teacher accomplishes this by matching responses to the student's current level of understanding.

### Evaluation

Prior to the end of the school year, a communique was sent to the families of the children in the study (Appendix H). At this time the parents were asked to answer the same questionnaire on their child's social knowledge that they had answered in September (See Appendix B). Also the classroom teacher administered the same interview to the kindergarten students concerning their reactions to conflict situations (See Appendix C). Through this questionnaire, interview, parent



**communications, and on going classroom evaluations, assessment of each child's progress with conflict resolution skills was monitored.**

## Chapter IV

### Results

Results from the action research will be discussed to address the question stated in the purpose of the study. This conflict resolution curriculum (a) is developmentally appropriate, (b) coincides with mandated instructional standards, and (c) will develop specific skills to resolve personal conflicts.

#### Developmentally Appropriate

Developmentally appropriate classrooms are age appropriate as well as individual appropriate. As children enter a kindergarten program, their abilities, interests, and experiences are quite varied. In the area of conflict resolution some children have strengths in problem solving, decision making, and communication skills. On the other hand, some children will need more structure and adult guidance than others. In developmentally appropriate classrooms, the goals of conflict resolution are appropriate for the child's age level and individual learning style; are reflective of the child's needs and interests; and address all areas of the child's development. The role of the teacher is to structure the classroom environment and provide appropriate learning opportunities through which the child can engage in enriching, meaningful experiences to develop the high-level skills needed in conflict resolution. The teacher, through developmentally appropriate teaching practices

models and clarifies the strategies of conflict resolution. In the initial stages the teacher is highly involved helping to define the problem and modeling language. As the children begin to develop their own strategies and use their own language, the teacher merely clarifies when needed. At the higher stages the children can go off by themselves to solve the problem, and then report their negotiations to receive affirmation.

A variety of teaching methods and experiences were provided to help the children move through the steps of conflict resolution and the levels of understanding. Role-playing, brainstorming, literature experiences, writing activities, group discussions, and games and problem solving activities were used. These instructional methods met the description of developmentally appropriate practices in conflict resolution.

### Role-playing

Teachers use role-playing as an important learning and teaching tool to practice conflict resolution strategies. At each step in conflict resolution, the teacher lets all the children practice the skills and dialogues so they can begin to construct their own meanings to the strategies.

The initial step of "calming" can be rehearsed through role-playing. The children can practice "draining" techniques where they tense themselves for 5 seconds

and then slowly release. In telling the children to pretend they are full bathtubs, open the drain and count to 5 while the water drains out, they can then step out of the bathtub to totally remove themselves from the anger. "Ballooning" is a similar technique in that they count to 5 as they become an expanding balloon, then slowly release the air as they reverse their count from 5 to zero.

Role-playing can help the children express feelings and needs in an assertive, nonthreatening way - the I-message. It is important that children practice telling the other child how their action has made them feel. Statements are made simply without putting blame on the other child; "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because you \_\_\_\_\_." In taking the blame and accusation out of conflict resolution can begin (See appendix D).

Practicing the receptive dialogues is done through role-playing. In working in pairs, children can practice the elements of good listening; looking at the person, staying quiet until your turn, thinking about what the person is saying, and showing you understand. Following role-playing the teacher can ask the pairs: "Was your partner listening to you?" "How do you know they were listening?" "How did you feel when they were/were not listening?"

### Brainstorming

This is a creative process that allows children to think of many possible

solutions to conflict. Initially brainstorming is used with role-playing to help the children develop a repertoire of practical solutions that they will be able to apply in actual resolutions. Brainstorming will help even the reluctant child think of solutions, and where there were originally very few or even no apparent solutions.

### Literature Experiences

There are many children's books that provide rich opportunities for talking about conflicts and how to resolve them. Using conflicts from books removes the intensity that can result when using the children's own conflicts, and provides a good way to look at the steps of conflict resolution.

### Writing Activities

Providing children with the opportunity to write and draw about conflict and resolution helps them to internalize the skills, and allows the teacher an opportunity to check the child's level of understanding. The children can practice all the skills through representations; recognizing conflict, expressing feelings, accepting feelings, and creating solutions. These writing activities can stem from literature experiences, group discussions, or actual conflicts. In resolution the final step is to affirm the solution. Children can pictorially express their solutions as they report their negotiations to the mediator.

### Group Discussions

Class meetings provide a time to discuss conflict resolution accomplishments; what was tried, what worked, and what did not work. The discussions create a sense of community by helping children develop a sense that they all have a role in helping each other live together peacefully.

### Games and Problem Solving Activities

Opportunities to practice the conflict resolution strategies are provided in a developmentally appropriate curriculum. In setting the environment, the teacher can pose situations that call for decision making and problem solving skills. The key is that the problems or issues raised are of interest to the children and have depth and complexity.

### Meeting Instructional Standards

In examining the components of the conflict resolution curriculum, The Primary program: *Growing and Learning in the Heartland* (1993), suggests that schools need to be a place where problems are posed and solutions generated; where mistakes are made and valued as learning experiences; where cooperation is nurtured in the face of conflict; where teachers, parents, and children make decisions together about what is best for children. As children progress through the steps of conflict resolution, they are reaching the goals outlined in *The Primary Program*.

In looking at the child's emotional and social development, conflict resolution helps the child gain confidence and competence in working with other people and functioning independently as well as cooperatively. Through resolution and the skills developed, the children develop a sense of community. In this community the teacher establishes a feeling of trust, protection, and mutual regard allowing the children to grow in the practice of cooperation, problem solving, and positive social behavior.

In the area of intellectual development, conflict resolution skills depend upon the development of the child's thinking, language development, and social interaction. The content of conflict resolution must be suited to the child's level of understanding. Because of the basic differences in intellectual development, the role of teacher as mediator will help the child move along the developmental continuum.

#### Developing Specific Skills Needed in Conflict Resolution

In order to determine the development of conflict resolution strategies in the children, interviews and questionnaires were used to look at entry and exit levels of understanding. In assessing the parent questionnaire, Social Knowledge Assessment Systems (See Appendix B), three areas concerning the children were represented. They were responsibility, problem solving, and interaction skills. Eighty percent of the parents responded to the questionnaire as they were administered in September

and May. Of those 20 responses, 18 parents believed that their child had shown overall social improvement in kindergarten.

In looking at the components of the questionnaire, the area of responsibility questioned:

1. Follows a direction the first time it is given.
2. Does an assigned chore or job without reminder.
3. Tells the truth.
4. Takes good care of belongings.
5. Only takes other property after asking and receiving permission.
6. Returns items that are borrowed.
7. Helps others at home without being asked.

The parents reported a 9.1% increase in the children's positive responses in responsibility (See Appendix I).

In looking at problem solving, the questions were:

1. In a daily disagreement will calmly state: How s/he feels, what s/he thinks, what s/he wants.
2. Demonstrates good judgement in problem resolution.
3. continues trying even when encountering difficulty.
4. Generates more than one solution to problems.



5. Entertains self with hobby or special interests.
6. Seeks attention in positive ways.
7. Asks for help when it is needed.

The parents reported a 8.9% increase in the positive responses to these questions (See Appendix I).

The third component questioned parents on their child's interaction skills:

1. Initiates and maintains conversation with parent for 2 minutes or more.
2. Gives compliments to others.
3. Has friends over to your home.
4. Laughs.
5. Says thank you.
6. Shares things willingly.
7. Uses words that describe feelings.
8. Makes special effort to do something helpful for others.
9. Communicates anger without physically hurting.
10. Without being reminded, uses eye contact when listening.

The parents reported a 9.5% increase in positive responses in the children's interaction skills (See Appendix I).

In focusing on a specific area in the problem solving area, consistent

improvement was shown by the parents' responses to the question: "In a disagreement will calmly state: How s/he feels; what s/he thinks; what s/he wants" (See Appendix B). The children were using the expressive and receptive communication skills emphasized in conflict resolution as noticed by their parents in interactions at home.

One parent's comments summarized the intent of the conflict resolution curriculum - to help the children begin to construct conflict resolution strategies. In September the parent states, "I have seen Terra act like a snob at time. We want her to get along with everyone, not just a select few. When she gets mad she refuses to talk about it. She walks away. When her brother and her fight she sometimes becomes physical with Him" (H. Van Buren, personal communication, September 10, 1993). On the second questionnaire, the parent responded, "We have seen Terra mature over this last year. She seems to be able to express herself better and tries to solve problems by herself" (H. Van Buren, personal communication, May 23, 1994).

In the classroom interviews (See Appendix C), more control was provided as the questions were asked each time by the same researcher, who was also the person who provided the instruction, environment opportunities, and assessment of the conflict resolution strategies. Of the 25 children in the program, 15 showed positive improvement in their responses, using strategies of conflict resolution. The questions

provided situations where the children dealt with conflicts that included physical and verbal attacks, insults, and infringements upon their space.

Typically, responses to the questions asked in September were "tell the teacher." The researcher's goal was to have the children respond to the same question in May using solutions drawn from their constructed conflict resolution strategies. One child's response to the question, "It is play time and you are playing with your friend. Your friend gets mad and hits you. What do you do?" In September he responded, "I punch him, I can punch really hard." In May his response was, "Tell him I don't like it, don't hit me please." He has shown that he has internalized the expressive communication skill needed in resolution.

One child whose responses in September were, "Tell the teacher," had developed the full repertoire of conflict resolution skills by May as shown in his responses to the second interview. In each response he stated, "I would say what was wrong, why did you do that? We would talk about it. If it doesn't work out again I would tell the teacher to help." This child has advanced to the negotiation stages of resolution, involving the other child in seeking solutions.

In assessing the progress of children in developing conflict resolution skills, the classroom teacher or the mediator is able to make the most accurate evaluation. This is done through the on-going evaluation and interaction with the child. The

teacher can monitor and model techniques to the child, using assessment as a guide to what the child needs in developing conflict resolution skills.

A communication from a parent of a child was supportive of the value of teaching conflict resolution skills in kindergarten, in the following way.

"This weekend when Brian and Heather were playing together and they started to have conflict, Brian told Heather they need a plan. I had never heard him say that before. Now I know you are working on strategies. I know that he is learning from it and I have seen his play with Heather become less aggressive. He used to push and shove her when she didn't do what he wanted. The past 2 weeks have been a pleasant change for the better! I will try to help Brian practice "strategies" as much as possible here at home when I can . . . Thanks so much for caring enough about the children in your class to teach them the social skills they need to make them better people. I can really see the difference in Brian and I'm hoping it will get better as the year continues. Keep us informed and we'll try to reinforce what you teach." (L. Stratton, personal communication, October 8, 1993)

## Chapter V

### Summary

This action research attempted to evaluate the question as to whether the conflict resolution curriculum (a) is developmentally appropriate, (b) coincides with mandated instructional standards, and (c) will develop specific skills to resolve personal conflicts. through literature review, these questions were addressed and supported. The value of the action research was substantiated through a successful implementation of conflict resolution instruction in kindergarten by this researcher.

Conflict resolution is developmentally appropriate, as strategies were presented in such a manner that all children could experience learning opportunities at age appropriate and individually appropriate levels. The classroom teacher guided the children through the steps of conflict resolution utilizing appropriate teaching methods and materials. Every day classroom activities of role-playing, brainstorming, literature experiences, writing activities, group discussions, and games and problem solving activities provided the children a variety of experiences needed to construct conflict resolution skills in an appropriate manner. The researcher sees the need for providing instruction in a developmentally appropriate manner. The children responded to conflict resolution instruction according to their developmental level, so learning opportunities must reflect that.

Conflict resolution was readily integrated into the existing instructional standards of the school district, as educational systems are looking at the development of the whole child. The continued practice and utilization of conflict resolution can only help to improve the pro-social behavior of children. The researcher sees great value for providing children the tools to live and work together peacefully. The school must provide children the guidance in conflict resolution that they need and are not receiving outside of the school.

Conflict resolution skills were facilitated through the implementation of a conflict resolution curriculum. The children were able to develop strategies in dealing with conflict. They could tell each other how they felt and how their actions affected them. They could then think of solutions to their conflict and negotiate a resolution. There is a need to provide children with these life long skills and data from this research verified the fact that young children can begin to develop and use conflict resolution strategies.

### Recommendations

The primary recommendation from this research is the continuance and further development of a conflict resolution curriculum implemented in kindergarten. A review of the literature and of the results of the action research support the value and the need for providing children the skills needed in conflict resolution.

Another recommendation would be to include a parent component in the curriculum. In continued dialogue with parents it was apparent that the expressive and receptive communication skills were not always practiced at home. Parents could be taught how to help their children negotiate sibling conflicts as well as parent-child conflicts. "Abilities to solve problems, both personal and social, are developed throughout the early years. Early child rearing and school experiences clearly affect adolescent and therefore most likely adult behavior" (Peck, McCraig, & Sapp, 1988, p. 46).

A further recommendation would be to provide teacher inservice to facilitate the transition of conflict resolution skills from kindergarten to first grade and through the elementary school. It was noticeable in this research that the ability to internalize and then utilize the strategies was determined by the child's emotional and mental maturity. "Social cognition refers to a child's ability to conceptualize and reason about the social world, a skill directly affected by and similar to their level of cognitive development" (Marion, 1991, p. 200). The same strategies presented to the child the second year could be easier for him/her to use due to their continually developing cognition.

### Conclusions

This action research advocates that conflict resolution curriculum is (a)

developmentally appropriate, (b) coincides with mandated instructional standards, and (c) will develop specific skills to resolve personal conflicts. The techniques can be easily integrated into a variety of activities by the classroom teacher. The simplicity of the conflict resolution steps allows for children to practice the skills and then develop their own strategies for resolution. Children who learn the skills of conflict resolution become responsible and caring human beings. They develop a feeling of self-worth, respect for all living things, and the skills needed to get along with others.



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**Appendix A**

September 15, 1993

Dear Parents,

I am asking your help on a project I am working on. I have been developing a teaching technique to use in Kindergarten that will teach the children a way to resolve their conflicts with their friends in a peaceful manner.

I have a survey I would hope each of you will fill out. Please take a few days and think about your child in each of the areas of the survey. Later in the year I will send you the same survey. I will be able to determine how effective my teaching is by comparing your two surveys, two surveys I will complete, and two questionnaires I give to the children.

I will not be looking at any particular child's behavior, just my overall teaching materials, and how effectively I can present the ideas.

Thank you so much for your time and help in this important project. If you need to talk with me, or have any questions, feel free to call me at school (after 3:30), or at home 227-7582.

Pam Goschke

Please return the completed surveys by Monday, September 20, 1993.

Appendix B

**SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM:  
PARENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

	NEVER	SELDOM	OFTEN	ALMOST ALWAYS
<b>RESPONSIBILITY</b>				
FOLLOWS A DIRECTION THE FIRST TIME IT IS GIVEN				
DOES AN ASSIGNED CHORE OR JOB WITHOUT REMINDER				
TELLS THE TRUTH				
TAKES GOOD CARE OF BELONGINGS				
ONLY TAKES OTHERS' PROPERTY AFTER ASKING AND RECEIVING PERMISSION				
RETURNS ITEMS THAT ARE BORROWED				
HELPS OTHERS AT HOME WITHOUT BEING ASKED				
<b>PROBLEM SOLVING</b>				
IN A DISAGREEMENT WILL CALMLY STATE:				
- HOW S/HE FEELS				
- WHAT S/HE THINKS				
- WHAT S/HE WANTS				
DEMONSTRATES GOOD JUDGMENT IN PROBLEM RESOLUTION				
CONTINUES TRYING EVEN WHEN ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTY				
GENERATES MORE THAN ONE SOLUTION TO PROBLEMS				
ENTERTAINS SELF WITH HOBBY OR SPECIAL INTERESTS				
SEEKS ATTENTION IN POSITIVE WAYS				
ASKS FOR HELP WHEN IT IS NEEDED				

	NEVER	SELDOM	OFTEN	ALMOST ALWAYS
<b>INTERACTION SKILLS</b>				
INITIATES AND MAINTAINS CONVERSATION WITH PARENT FOR TWO MINUTES OR MORE				
GIVE COMPLIMENTS TO OTHERS				
HAS FRIENDS OVER TO YOUR HOME				
LAUGHS				
SAYS THANK YOU				
SHARES THINGS WILLINGLY				
USES WORDS THAT DESCRIBE FEELINGS				
MAKES SPECIAL EFFORT TO DO SOMETHING HELPFUL FOR OTHERS				
COMMUNICATES ANGER WITHOUT PHYSICALLY HURTING				
WITHOUT BEING REMINDED, USES EYE CONTACT WHEN LISTENING				

**CHILD'S STRENGTHS:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL):** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Appendix C

**Student Questionnaire for Conflict Resolution**

1. It is recess time and you are playing with a ball, someone comes over and takes your ball away.

**What do you do?**

2. You are drawing a picture and the child beside you said, "That's ugly!"

**What do you do?**

3. You are standing in line to get a drink and someone "budges in."

**What do you do?**

4. It is play time and you are playing with your friend. Your friend gets mad and hits you.

**What do you do?**

Appendix D

# I-MESSAGE

\_\_\_\_\_,  
person's name

I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.  
(feeling) (specific behavior) (how it affects me)

I would like \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(what would make the situation better for me)

Appendix E

# I feelings

I feel:

happy

sad

mad

bored

embarrassed

lonely

jealous

afraid

hurt

upset

Appendix F

# **GROUND RULES**

- 1. Treat each other with respect.**
- 2. No interrupting.**
- 3. Work to solve the problem.**



**Appendix G**

# How To Talk It Out

1.



Take time to  
Cool off.

2.



Talk and listen.

3.



Think of ways  
to solve the  
problem.

4.



Choose the  
idea you like  
best!



**Appendix H**

**Dear Families:**

Thank you so much for your help and support this school year. Your children and I have become good friends and I have greatly enjoyed my time with them and my contact with you.

I have one last request. Last fall I sent you a survey concerning your child's behavior at home. If you could fill this out again I can try to determine if our efforts in learning conflict resolution strategies at school have carried over to home.

Please try to return this by May 25th.

Thank you,

Pam Goschke

**Appendix I**

Table 1

## Social Knowledge Assessment System

## Parent Questionnaire

	<u>September</u> (total)	<u>May</u> (total)	<u>Percentage Increase</u>
Responsibility	365	391	9.1%
Problem Solving	440	492	8.9%
Interaction	539	570	9.5%