10 Learning to cope with conflict and violence: how schools can help youth

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This chapter focuses on the complex conflicts that youths face in their lives, particularly the kinds of conflicts that schools pose for youth. We also identify ways that schools can structure their pedagogy and policies to foster the values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills to enable youths to cope with conflict constructively. We argue that it is crucial for schools to do so in order better to prepare our youths to live in a more peaceful world. First, we provide an orientation to conflict.

An orientation to conflict

Conflict is like sex; it is an important and pervasive aspect of life. It should be enjoyed and should occur with a reasonable degree of frequency, and after a conflict is over the people involved should feel better than they did before. This is most likely to happen if the people involved are mutually respectful and mutually responsive to each other's needs.

Some psychiatrists and social scientists have given conflict a bad reputation by linking it with psychopathology, social disorder, and war. Conflict can be dysfunctional, but it also can be productive. It has many positive functions, including preventing stagnation and stimulating interest and curiosity (Coser 1956). It is the medium through which problems can be aired and solutions developed. It is the root of personal and social change. The practical and scientific issue is not how to eliminate or prevent conflict but rather how to have lively controversy rather than deadly quarrels.

A conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur (Deutsch 1973). The incompatible actions may originate in one person, group, or nation (i.e. intrapersonal, intragroup, or intranational conflict) or they may reflect incompatible actions of two or more persons, groups, or nations (i.e. interpersonal, intergroup, or international conflict). An action that is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes, injures, or in some way makes the latter less likely or effective. A potential conflict exists when the parties involved perceive themselves to have incompatible values, interests, goals, needs, or beliefs. A veridical conflict is based on incompatibilities that are perceived correctly. When the incompatibilities do not exist but are perceived to exist, the conflict is based on misunderstanding. Conflicts rooted in misunderstanding can be as deadly as those rooted in true incompatibilities.
A distinction often is made between two types of conflict: zero-sum and mixed-motive (Schelling 1960). In a zero-sum or 'win-lose' conflict, what one person gains the other person loses. In a mixed-motive conflict, it is possible for both persons to gain, both to lose, or for one to gain and the other to lose. Each person has a mixture of cooperative and competitive interests toward the other. Most conflicts are mixed-motive, but if the parties involved see their conflict as zero-sum, they are apt to engage in a win-lose, competitive struggle that will produce a destructive process of conflict resolution that has harmful outcomes.

How youth cope with conflict

Consistent with Frydenberg and Lewis's (1993) definition of coping as cognitive and affective actions that arise to restore equilibrium, we define coping with conflict as "the strategies and tactics that people employ to deal with conflict in their lives." Coping strategies and tactics can be functional or constructive and lead to more effective, satisfying processes, relationships, and outcomes. Constructive coping strategies and tactics transform conflicts into problems that need resolving and accurately identify human, tangible, and intangible resources that promote integrative, win-win options. Coping strategies and tactics can also be dysfunctional or destructive and lead to ineffective, unsatisfying processes, relationships, and outcomes. Destructive coping strategies and tactics transform conflict processes in negative ways that lead to conflict escalation and negative outcomes (cf. Rubin et al. 1999).

Constructive conflict

A constructive process of conflict resolution is similar to an effective, cooperative problem-solving process where the conflict is perceived as a mutual problem to be solved through the collaborative effort of the conflicting parties (Deutsch 1973). In a constructive process, the different parties seek to understand one another's needs and concerns (through emphatic communication and listening) as a basis for diagnosing their mutual problem, and then they creatively search for new options for dealing with the conflict that can lead to mutual gain. If no option for mutual gain can be discovered, they seek to agree upon a mutually acceptable fair rule or procedure for deciding how the conflict will be resolved.

While conflict can be a source of discomfort and pose difficult challenges, conflict can also be a positive experience and yield beneficial personal, interpersonal, intergroup, and institutional effects. At the personal level, constructive conflict processes stir personal growth, clarify values and goals, offer an opportunity for self-definition, as well as to improve self-esteem, skills, and knowledge acquisition. At the interpersonal and intergroup levels, constructive conflict processes stimulate creativity; offer an opportunity for examining social relationships; lead to social insight; sharpen skills of perspective taking, listening, and problem solving; deepen relationships; maintain valued social norms; and lead to change in the status quo. At the institutional level, constructive conflict processes foster critical examination of institutional practices, and in so doing, it can lead to improvements that benefit the institution as a whole as well as the individuals and groups connected with it.
Seventh graders describe the way that conflict can enliven their lives (Opotow 1991a):

I think fights are important because next time they'll think twice before messing with you because they know you'll defend yourself.

Without conflicts and fights you will never find out who you are and what type of person you like and what you want out of life.

You can find out how another person reacts to certain things ... You can find out more about persons. Sometimes even the fights help you establish a relationship with somebody.

**Destructive conflict**

Destructive conflict is characterized by a tendency to expand and escalate (Deutsch 1973 1983). As a result, such conflict often becomes independent of its initiating causes and is likely to continue after these causes have become irrelevant or have been forgotten. Expansion occurs along the various dimensions of conflict: the size and number of the immediate issues involved, the number of motives and participants implicated on each side of the issue, the size and number of the principles and precedents that are perceived to be at stake, the costs that the participants are willing to bear in relation to the conflict, the number of norms of moral conduct from which behaviour toward the other side is exempted, and the intensity of negative attitudes toward the other side. Paralleling the expansion of the scope of conflict is an increasing reliance on a strategy of power and on the tactics of threat, coercion, and deception. Correspondingly, there is a shift away from a strategy of persuasion and from the tactics of conciliation, minimization of differences, and enhancement of mutual understanding and goodwill.

Destructive conflict can have negative personal, interpersonal, intergroup, and institutional effects. At the interpersonal level, it can lead to violence and humiliation, damaged self-esteem, and distraction from learning. At the intergroup level, it can injure relationships, lead to stereotyping and viewing the other as an enemy, as well as to violence. At the institutional level, destructive conflict can disrupt institutional effectiveness and make it difficult for individuals and groups within the institution to cooperate. Avoiding and suppressing conflicts can also have harmful effects, such as increased tensions, perceptual distortion, disrupted communication, being bogged down, rationalizing harmful outcomes, and moral exclusion (Opotow 1990 1995).

The enduring effects of a destructive conflict are reflected in a quote from a seventh grader who remained uneasy about her role in a conflict, 3 months earlier, that ended a long friendship (Opotow 1991a):

I'm not gonna say that it was all her fault. Because it might have been something else that I had done to her already and maybe with that on top of it she said 'Forget it'.

I don't know. Maybe it might have been something else that I had already done and never realized that I did.

Another seventh grader's comment captures the social isolation, humiliation, and loss of status felt after a destructive conflict: 'Everybody's looking at you; when you lose everybody puts their backs to you.'
Violence

Physical violence is the most obvious symptom of destructive conflict and is the most easily documented. While its effects are less visible, psychological violence—humiliation, verbal abuse, rejection, neglect—undoubtedly is more common. The massive exposure of children and adolescents to physical violence, as victims, perpetrators, and witnesses, has gained attention in the public health community. Understandably, less attention has been paid to psychological violence, even though exposure to it may be as harmful. Exposure to violence occurs in families, schools, neighbourhoods, in countries involved in war or torn apart by civil strife, as well as in the mass media, children's video games, and their 'war' toys.

Most of what is known about the effects of exposure to destructive conflict centres on the effect of violence on youth (see Eron et al. 1994; for a comprehensive survey). Research has indicated that continued exposure to violence 'teaches' violent behaviour by leading to emotional desensitization and habituation to the emotional arousal associated with inflicting, witnessing, or experiencing violence. As inhibitions against aggressive behaviour are lowered, violence becomes normalized and legitimized in the eyes of the perpetrator and observer.

This process can be especially powerful when violence is witnessed in the family. In addition to the physical and psychological damage suffered by abused children, being a target of family violence can stimulate a child to aggress against others, although this outcome is by no means inevitable. Children who are not themselves abused but who witness violence between their parents also internalize norms about the acceptability of violence which can lead to bullying (Olweus 1991) and sexual and physical violence in high school dating relationships (Sudermann et al. 1995). Less is known about the long-term effects of experiencing or witnessing violence in other contexts, but theories of socialization and modelling suggest that the processes are similar.

Deficiencies in problem-solving and other conflict resolution skills

Youth who engage in destructive conflict strategies, particularly the use of violence, may have generalized deficiencies in social problem-solving and interpersonal skills as well as limited cognitive flexibility. Research has indicated a link between destructive conflict and such deficiencies as poor communication skills, difficulties in taking the other's perspective, problems in establishing bonds with the other, and an inability to perceive conflicts in multidimensional terms and generate multiple strategies for coping with them (Deutsch et al. 1992; Cahn 1994; Johnson and Johnson 1995). An extreme example of the limited perception of options comes from a 15-year old boy who described guns in his neighbourhood as being 'as common as water'. He told a reporter that he had not yet shot at anybody, but felt he may have to. 'I don't want to shoot nobody. But if they bully me, disrespect my mother, or mess with any one of my family, they're just going to have to get it. That's what it's about.' (Pooley 1991).

The previous quotation demonstrates the destructive ways in which youth may think about conflict and how to deal with it. The combination of exposure to violence and a lack of perceived alternatives for resolving conflict changes the standards for what is normal, what is acceptable, what is legitimate, and, as suggested in the phrase 'they're just going to have to get it', what is considered necessary in response to threat or insult.
Moreover, it demonstrates the process of conflict expansion, in which an insult to oneself or one’s family becomes, literally, a matter of life and death, and the need to defend one’s personal self-image becomes a larger matter of salvaging one’s public image as well.

The cultural context of conflict

The cultural context in which a conflict occurs is a crucial determinant of the course that the conflict will take. It can lead the conflicting parties to see the conflict as a mutual problem to be solved cooperatively or it can orient them to see their conflict as a competitive struggle which they either win or lose. Whether it is the small cultural context of a particular interpersonal relationship or the larger context of a group, classroom, institution, community, or nation, the context will often contain implicit assumptions about the nature of conflict and how to manage it. At the national level, there is considerable evidence that the ‘cultures’ of different national groups—such as the Japanese, the French, the Americans—have differing assumptions about conflict management (Fisher 1990; Rahim 1992; Faure and Rubin 1993; Cahn 1994; Kimmel 1994). At the interpersonal level, it is also evident that the implicit norms about conflicts often differ when the conflict is between members of the same or opposite sex, between people of similar or different ages, between equals or unequals. Lack of full awareness of the cultural context of the other person or group may lead to behaviour which the other feels is unfair, demeaning, or a challenge to one’s identity. Adolescents are often hypersensitive to being ‘dissed’ (disrespected). In multi-ethnic schools, the cultural diversity of students is apt to lead to misunderstandings of the meaning of a given behaviour—with an increased likelihood that they will feel unjustly ‘dissed.’

Conflicts in the lives of youth

To understand how youth cope with conflicts it is important to take a perspective that considers the breadth of conflicts children experience in their lives. Although the focus of this chapter is primarily on youth, our discussion inevitably considers the role of adults in these conflicts because of their pervasive influence on youth. These adults include parents, teachers, school administrators and support staff, and adults in the immediate and larger community.

Youth can experience conflict at home, with peers, at school, in their community, and in their society. Within each of these contexts, conflicts can be narrow and confined or broad and expanded. Some conflicts are personal and include such decisions as ‘what should I do?’ when responsibilities clash with the desire to escape from stressors. Some conflicts are interpersonal and can occur in relationships with peers, parents, teachers, and authority figures. Some conflicts are intergroup and occur in relationships between competing peer groups, between students and teachers, and among community groups. Some conflicts are institutional and occur when individuals or groups question organizational policies, processes, and outcomes. Some conflicts are societal and address social issues. These include the conflicts that youth face when they are poor in an affluent society or when they lack skills they need for jobs; when ethnic minorities are
Violence in the streets

In inner-city neighborhoods throughout the United States, violence levels have reached epidemic proportions, and youth are well acquainted with it. One study of inner-city adolescents in the United States found that 24 per cent had witnessed a murder, 72 per cent knew someone who had been shot, and 20 per cent reported that their lives had been threatened (Deutsch and Brickman 1992). The consequences of violence against youth in terms of injury are dramatic: In the first 10 months of 1993, 387 children under the age of 16 were shot in New York City. The easy availability of weapons increases the dangerous potential of conflicts. Violence affects attitudes toward everyday life. A 15 year old student explained another student's indifference toward school: 'If you live in a bad community and all these people are getting killed, that affects the way he thinks. He could work as hard and just get killed.' (Opotow 1998).

Civil violence: youth exposed to war

Throughout the world, many children grow up in countries torn apart by ethnic violence or war. Such children often demonstrate symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and develop perceptions of the social environment which legitimize violence as a way of handling disputes (Cairns 1996).

Prejudice and discrimination

Reports from schools suggest that incidents of bias and 'hate crimes' are on the rise, a not uncommon occurrence during periods of economic distress (Staub 1989). The dynamics underlying acts of prejudice and discrimination parallel those of destructive conflict: emphasizing differences rather than similarities, portraying the 'outgroup' as a threat to the well-being and resources of the 'ingroup', and perceiving this threat in competitive, 'zero-sum' terms. The prevalence of prejudiced cognitions and behaviours can indoctrinate youth in the processes associated with destructive conflict.

Mass media, children's video games, and toys

The mass media and the video games and toys with which children play reflect and create societal norms. Research suggests that televised violence can affect children's aggressive tendencies (Eron et al. 1994). While these effects are not strong for the majority of children, the remaining minority are not insignificant if one considers the large numbers of children who watch TV. The effects appear to be long-term, as familiarity with violence on the screen habituates the child to it and makes it a salient and attractive means of dealing with conflict.

Socioeconomic conditions

Social norms within the child's community and society, his or her experiences within the family and schools, the models provided by the mass media, the child's social skills and cognitive abilities, and the child's personality and temperament are some of the more
community face; it can reduce the vitality of curricula for students; and it can dull student motivation and enthusiasm for learning. It can do this in two ways. First, when school relationships degenerate and fester, staff contact and energy is directed away from pedagogical innovation and is directed toward waging or suppressing conflict. Second, when controversy is absent from the academic curriculum, the real intellectual controversy that makes scholarship exciting is also missing. As a consequence, learning becomes a more passive and a less morally and intellectually engaging enterprise. (See Johnson and Johnson 1995.)

**Students' conflicts at school**

School may be the most consistent source of norms and behaviour models to which youth are exposed. It also is a major arena of crime and violence by and against youth. In the United States, there are almost 1 million incidents of attempted or completed assault, rape, robbery, or theft inside schools or on school property annually; there is a growing trend for crimes committed in schools to include weapons possession (Deutsch and Brickman 1992).

There also are numerous instances of 'lower level' violence and harassment in schools. Many students are systematically intimidated by peers; recent reports suggest that one in ten students is harassed regularly or attacked by bullies (Olweus 1978, 1991). Moreover, bullying can have an impact beyond its immediate target, with passive witnesses also becoming anxious and distressed. In addition, bullying can influence individuals, groups, and an institutional climate as habitual bullying can normalize interpersonal aggression and violence. Schools are not only the source of academic learning, but are also environments for learning about conflict. Schools therefore have immense potential to model and transmit the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour consistent with constructive approaches to conflict.

**Students' peer conflicts**

Students' conflicts and their responses depend on their age, subcultural norms, and their dispute resolution skills. Common conflicts among elementary school students concerned possession and access to resources, preferences about what to do, playground issues, turn taking, and physical or verbal aggression (Johnson and Johnson 1995). Common conflicts among older students concerned harassment, unreasonable behaviour, jealousy, gossip, and property and money disputes (Davis and Porter 1985). A study of destructive intergroup conflict among adolescents from different ethnic, racial, or religious groups (Marsh 1993) found that group hatred can become entrenched as the result of threat, mutual rejection, alienation, persecution that bolsters one's sense of power, and smouldering resentment over past events. Norms emphasizing intergroup enmity feel protective when they offer students allies and a feeling of superiority.

**Students' responses in peer conflict**

Without dispute resolution training or skills, students try to resolve their conflicts by forcing an opponent to concede or withdrawing from the conflict (Johnson and Johnson 1995). A study by Opotow (1991b) revealed that when middle school students
coped with interpersonal conflict with peers, they did so in habitual ways that became a part of their social identity. Their responses, located along a confrontation continuum, could be categorized as avoidance, unemotional verbal communication, mannered contact, direct physical or verbal confrontation, aggressive physical or verbal confrontation, expanding the conflict, and no-holds-barred combat. Students whose response was habitually at either extreme were at risk of destructive conflict. 'Avoiders' were easy targets for angry or upset peers; 'seekers' were seen as 'looking for trouble' even when their behavior was ambiguous.

When students perceive that they have been treated unfairly, they may respond with anger, threats, physical violence, 'dissing', or other negative behaviors that may lead to an embittered, escalating conflict. However, this response is not inevitable. If schools were not oriented toward suppressing conflict and if they recognized students' intense feelings about being treated with respect and justice, schools could motivate the students to explore new ways of thinking and behaving when they feel that they have been treated unfairly. For students to accept and benefit from adult intervention in their peer conflicts, the adults must be convincingly interested in and respectful of the students' perspectives, values, and decisions.

Conflicts between students and teachers

The expressed and unexpressed conflicts students can have with teachers are often a hidden and more difficult type of conflict for schools to confront. Interviews that explored high school students' decisions to cut classes indicated pedagogical critique as one source of underlying conflict that can lead to cutting (Opotow 1994 1998):

If the teacher's not teaching us, then how are you supposed to get involved and everything?

It's like we're stupid. Just like, 'here's the work' and they're gonna sit down and drink some coffee.

The last five minutes of class, he gives you all the answers. That does not help.

If class is boring, why go?

Students see the temptations to stay in bed and sleep, or to leave school and hang out with friends instead of attending classes as a way of coping with disappointing classes that they do not see as preparing them for academic or career success.

When students explore relationships with teachers, they can blunder into tactical errors that they later come to see as counterproductive: 'My freshman year I fooled around to see how far I can go, but then you want to learn. They [i.e. teachers] give you attitude and you give 'em back and so it is like confrontation. And that is one less teacher that you can get help from.' When student-teacher relationships are non-productive and confrontational on a large scale, entrenched, negative intergroup attitudes and pervasive conflict can interfere with learning. A high school student described his friend's school (Opotow 1998):

My boy he went to —— High School, and like that's known as 'No Hope High'. There's some schools, there are a few teachers that really don't even care after awhile. Some students just act up so bad that the teachers after awhile don't even care. The students who do want to learn they just miss on that.
The next sections discuss each component of conflict resolution systems, with more emphasis on cooperative learning and conflict resolution, because they provide a valuable base for education in constructive controversy and mediation. We begin with cooperative learning because cooperation is a crucial precondition for constructive conflict resolution.

**Cooperative learning**

Although cooperative learning has many ancestors and can be traced back for at least 2000 years, it is only in this century that there has been development of a theoretical base, systematic research, and systematic teaching procedures for cooperative learning. There are five key elements of cooperative learning (Johnson et al. 1986). The most important is *positive interdependence*. Students must perceive that it is to their advantage if other students learn well and that it is to their disadvantage if others do poorly. This can be achieved in many different ways: through mutual goals (goal interdependence); division of labour (task interdependence); dividing resources, materials, or information among group members (resource interdependence); and by giving joint rewards (reward interdependence).

In addition, cooperative learning requires *face-to-face interaction* in which students can express their positive interdependence in behaviour. It also requires *individual accountability* of each member of the cooperative learning group to one another for mastering the material to be learned and for providing appropriate support and assistance to each other. Furthermore, it is necessary for the students to be trained in the *interpersonal and small group skills* needed for effective cooperative work in groups. Finally, cooperative learning also involves providing students with the time and procedures for *processing* or analysing how well their learning groups are functioning and what can be done to improve how they work together. Given the diversity of urban schools, there are considerable opportunities to compose cooperative learning groups that are heterogeneous with regard to gender, academic ability, ethnic background, and physical disability. Research indicates that diversity in cooperative learning helps to reduce prejudice and improve relationships among different ethnic groups in schools (Johnson and Johnson 1989). In the context of cooperative learning, heterogeneity is an educational resource rather than an impediment to learning.

Hundreds of research studies have been done on the relative effects of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning experiences (see Johnson and Johnson 1983, 1989). The various studies of cooperative learning are quite consistent with one another and with initial theoretical work and research on the effects of cooperation and competition (Deutsch 1949a, b) in indicating very favourable effects on students. Students develop considerably greater commitment, helpfulness, and caring for each other regardless of differences in ability level, ethnic background, gender, social class, or physical disability. They develop more skill in taking the perspective of others, emotionally as well as cognitively. They develop greater self-esteem and a greater sense of being valued by their classmates. They develop more positive attitudes toward learning, school, and their teachers. They usually learn more in the subjects they study by cooperative learning, and they acquire more of the skills and attitudes that are conducive to effective collaboration with others.
It is evident that cooperative education fosters constructive relations. Moreover, when used by skilful teachers, it can help children overcome alienated or hostile orientations to others, as well as ethnic prejudice, that they have developed from earlier experiences (see Johnson and Johnson (1989) and Deutsch et al. (1992) for a more extensive discussion of mental health effects).

However, it is important to realize that, although the concept of cooperative learning is simple, its practise is not. Changing a classroom and school so that they emphasize cooperative learning requires that teachers learn many new skills. Among these skills is learning how to cooperate among themselves so that the school itself and their work become more cooperative. In addition, they have to learn many new teaching skills, such as ways to teach students cooperative skills, ways to monitor and intervene in student work groups to improve students' collaborative skills, methods of composing student groups and structuring cooperative learning goals so that groups are likely to work well together, ways of developing curriculum materials to promote positive interdependence, ways to create constructive academic controversies within the cooperative groups, and ways of integrating the cooperative learning with competitive and individualistic learning activities. It usually takes teachers about 3 or 4 years to become well skilled in the use of cooperative learning. Unless teachers, themselves, are well skilled in cooperation, teacher efforts that rely on cooperation, such as team teaching and curriculum coordination efforts, can fail and lead to destructive conflict among the teachers which siphons off creative energy from pedagogical innovation.

**Conflict resolution training**

There is much to suggest that there is a two-way relation between effective cooperation and constructive conflict resolution. Good cooperative relations facilitate the constructive management of conflict; the ability to handle constructively the inevitable conflicts that occur during cooperation facilitates the survival and deepening of cooperative relations.

In recent years, conflict resolution training programmes have sprouted in schools, industries, and community dispute-resolution centres. Here, we focus on such programmes in schools. There are many different programs, and their contents vary with the age and background of the students (see Bodine and Crawford (1998) for a comprehensive review of such programmes in the United States and Lim and Deutsch (1997) for such programmes outside North America).

Nevertheless, there are some common elements running through most programmes. They derive from a large body of research and practice (e.g. Deutsch 1949a, b, 1973; Walton and McKersie 1965; Lewicki and Litterer 1985; Cornelius and Faire 1989; Breslin and Rubin 1991; Fisher et al. 1991; Pruitt and Carnevale 1993; Rubin et al. 1994) as well as from the recognition that a constructive process of conflict resolution is similar to an effective, cooperative problem-solving process (in which the conflict is perceived as the mutual problem to be solved) whereas a destructive process is similar to a win–lose, competitive struggle (Deutsch 1973). Most conflict resolution training programmes seek to instil the attitudes, knowledge, and skills that are conducive to effective, cooperative problem solving and to discourage the attitudes and habitual responses that give rise to win–lose struggles. In effect, these programmes facilitate
scrutiny of the habitual strategies and tactics that people use to cope with conflict and provide people with more constructive and cooperative strategies and tactics that lead to more effective and satisfying processes, relationships, and outcomes.

Below, we list the central elements that are included in many training programmes. The sequence in which they are taught varies as a function of the nature of the group being taught (e.g. Raider 1995; Bodine and Crawford 1998). These elements apply not only to training of students, but also to training school-connected adults—including administrators, teachers, staff, and parents—in the attitudes and skills of constructive conflict resolution. These elements apply to conflict at all levels: personal, interpersonal, intergroup, and institutional.

Know what type of conflict you* are involved in
There are three major types of conflict: the zero-sum conflict (a pure win–lose conflict), the mixed motive (both can win, both can lose, or one can win and the other lose), and the pure cooperative (both can win or both can lose). It is important to know what kind of conflict you are in because the different types require different types of strategies and tactics (see Walton and McKersie 1965; Lewicki and Litterer 1985; Pruitt and Rubin 1986). The common tendency is for inexperienced parties to define their conflicts as win–lose even though it is a mixed-motive conflict. Very few conflicts are intrinsically win–lose conflicts, but if they are misperceived to be such, the parties involved are apt to engage in a competitive, destructive process of conflict resolution. This is so unless there are very strong accepted norms or rules regulating the nature of the competitive interaction (as in competitive games).

The strategies and tactics of the different types of conflict differ. In a zero-sum conflict one seeks to amass, mobilize, and use the various resources of power (Lasswell and Kaplan 1950) in such a way that one can bring to bear on the conflict more effective, relevant power than one’s adversary. If this is not possible in the initial area of conflict, one seeks to transform the arena of conflict into one in which one’s effective power is greater than one’s adversary’s. Other strategies and tactics in win–lose conflicts involve outwitting, misleading, seducing, blackmailing, and the various forms of the black arts that have been discussed by Machiavelli (1950), Potter (1966), Schelling (1960), and Alinsky (1971), among others. The strategy and tactics involved in mixed-motive conflicts are discussed below. Our emphasis is on the strategy of cooperative problem solving to find a mutually satisfactory solution to the conflict and on the development and application of mutually acceptable fair principles to handle situations in which the aspirations of both sides cannot cooperative conflicts involve primarily cooperative fact-finding and research as well as rational persuasion.

Become aware of the causes and consequences of violence and of the alternatives to violence, even when you are very angry
Become realistically aware of how much violence there is, how many young people die from violence, the role of weapons in leading to violence, how frequently homicides are

* By 'you' we mean a person (of any age or role), a group, an institution, a community, a polity, or a nation that is party to a conflict.
precipitated by arguments, and how alcohol and drugs contribute to violence. Become aware of what makes you very angry; learn the healthy and unhealthy ways you have of expressing anger. Learn how to actively channel your anger in ways that are not violent and are not likely to provoke violence from the other. Even if you are very angry, avoid attacking the other’s pride, self-esteem, security, identity, or those with whom he or she identifies. Understand that violence begets violence and that if you ‘win’ an argument by violence, the other will try to get even in some other way. Learn alternatives to violence in dealing with conflict. Also, learn how to deal with the other’s anger by recognizing and acknowledging it, by seeking to find out why the other is angry, and by apologizing if you have unwittingly harmed or affronted the other. Prothrow-Stith (1987) and others (see Eron et al. (1994) for a description of many programmes) have developed very helpful curricula for adolescents on the prevention of violence.

Face conflict rather than avoid it

Recognize that conflict may make you anxious and that you may try to avoid it. Learn the typical defences that you use to evade conflict (e.g. denial, suppression, becoming overly agreeable, rationalization, postponement, premature conflict resolution). Become aware of the negative consequences of evading conflict, such as irritability, tension, and persistence of the problem. Learn what kinds of conflicts are best avoided rather than confronted—for example, conflicts that will evaporate shortly, those that are inherently unresolvable, and win–lose conflicts that you are unlikely to win.

Respect yourself and your interests, and respect the other and his or her interests

Personal insecurity and sense of vulnerability often lead people to define conflicts as life or death, win–lose struggles even when they are relatively minor, mixed-motive conflicts. This definition may lead to conflict avoidance, premature conflict resolution, or obsessive involvement in the conflict. Helping students develop respect for themselves and their interests enables them to see their conflicts in reasonable proportion and facilitates their constructive confrontation. Helping students learn to respect the other and the other’s interests inhibits the use of tactics of power, coercion, deprecation, and deception that commonly escalate the issues and often lead to violence.

Valuing oneself, one’s own group, and others, as well as respect for the differences between oneself, others, and other groups are rooted in the fundamental moral commitment to the principle of universal human dignity. This core value not only should be emphasized in the curricula of many school subjects (e.g. literature, geography, history, social studies) from kindergarten to school-leaving age, but also should be learned by students from their observations of how teachers and school administrators treat students and other people in and around the schools.

Avoid ethnocentrism: understand and accept the reality of cultural difference

Be aware that you live in a community, a nation, and a world with people from many different cultures. People from different cultures may differ from you in their appearance, dress, behaviour, perceptions, beliefs, preferences, values, history, and ways of
thinking about conflict and negotiation. What you take to be self-evident and right may not seem that way to people from different cultural backgrounds and, conversely, what they take as self-evident and right may not seem that way to you. Learn to understand and accept the reality of cultural differences: try to understand the other's culture and try to help the other to understand yours. Expect cultural misunderstandings, and use them as opportunities for learning rather than as a basis of estrangement.

Distinguish clearly between interests and positions

Positions may be opposed, but interests may not be (Fisher et al. 1991). The classic example from Follett (1940) is that of a brother and sister, each of whom wanted the only orange available. The sister wanted the peel of the orange to make marmalade; the brother wanted to eat the inner part. Their positions ('I want the orange') were opposed, but their interests were not. Often when conflicting parties reveal their underlying interests, it is possible to find a solution that suits them both.

Explore your interests and the other's interests to identify the common and compatible interests that you share

Identifying shared interests makes it easier to deal constructively with the interests that you perceive as being opposed. A full exploration of one another's interests increases empathy and facilitates subsequent problem solving. For an excellent discussion of how to develop empathy and a sense of shared interests, see Schulman and Mekler (1985).

Define the conflicting interests between yourself and the other as a mutual problem to be solved cooperatively

Define the conflict in the smallest terms possible, as a 'here-now-this' conflict rather than a conflict between personalities or general principles—that is, as a conflict about a specific behaviour rather than about who is a better person. Diagnose the problem clearly, and then seek creative new options that lead to mutual gain. If no option for mutual gain can be discovered, seek to agree on a fair rule or procedure for deciding how the conflict will be resolved. However, not all conflicts can be resolved to mutual satisfaction even with the most creative thinking. In such cases, agreeing on a fair procedure to determine who gets his or her way, or seeking help from neutral third parties when such an agreement cannot be reached, may be the most constructive resolution possible (see Lewicki and Litterer (1985) for an excellent discussion of the strategy and tactics of integrative bargaining).

In communicating with the other, listen attentively and speak so as to be understood

This requires an active effort to take the perspective of the other and to check continually your success in doing so. You should listen to the other's meaning and emotion in such a way that the other feels understood as well as is understood. Similarly, you need to communicate to the other your thoughts and feelings in such a way that you have good evidence that he or she understands the way you think and feel. Do not assume that the other can read your mind. The feeling of being understood, as well as effective communication, facilitates constructive resolution.
Lewicki and Litterer (1985), Johnson and Johnson (1987), Prutzman et al. (1988), and many others have provided excellent discussions and practical exercises for developing effective communicating and listening skills. As a communicator, you need to be skilled in obtaining and holding the other’s attention, in phrasing your communication so that it is readily comprehended and remembered, and in acquiring the credibility that facilitates acceptance of your message. Skills in taking the perspectives of others and obtaining feedback about the effectiveness of your communications are important. Listening actively and effectively entails not only taking the perspective of the other so that you understand the communicator’s ideas and feelings, but also communicating your desire to understand the other and indicating, your understanding through paraphrasing or through questions, what you do not understand. Role reversal seems to be helpful in developing an understanding of the other’s perspective and providing checks on how effective the communication process has been.

**Be alert to the natural tendencies to bias, misperceptions, misjudgements, and stereotyped thinking that commonly occur in yourself and the other during heated conflict**

Psychologists can provide a checklist of the common forms of misperception and misjudgement that occur during intense conflict. These include black–white thinking, demonizing the other, shortening your time perspective, narrowing your range of perceived options, and the fundamental attribution error. The fundamental attribution error is illustrated in the tendency to attribute the aggressive actions of the other to the other’s personality while attributing your own aggressive actions to external circumstances (such as the other’s hostile actions). The ability to recognize and admit your misconceptions and misjudgements clears the air and facilitates similar acknowledgement by the other (see Jervis 1976; Nisbett and Ross 1980; Kahneman et al. 1982).

**Develop skills for dealing with difficult conflicts so that you are not helpless when confronting those who are more powerful, who don’t want to engage in constructive conflict resolution, or who use dirty tricks**

It is important to recognize that you become less vulnerable to intimidation by a more powerful other, to someone who bullies you, to someone who refuses to cooperate except on his or her terms, or to someone who plays dirty tricks (deceives, welshes on an agreement, personally attacks you, etc.) if you realize that you usually have a choice: you don’t have to stay in the relationship with the other. You are more likely to be aware of your freedom to choose between leaving or staying if you feel that there are alternatives to continuing the relationship that you can accept. The alternative may not be great, but it may be better than staying in the relationship. The freedom to choose prevents the other, if he or she benefits from the relationship, from making the relationship unacceptable to you.

Second, it is useful to be open and explicit to the other about what he or she is doing that is upsetting you and to indicate the effects that their actions are having on you. If the other asserts that you have misunderstood or denies doing what you have stated, and if you are not persuaded, be forthright in maintaining that this remains a problem for you. Discuss with the other what could be done to remove the problem (your
misunderstanding of the other, your need for reassurance, or the other’s noxious behaviour).

Third, it is wise to avoid reciprocating the other’s behaviour and to avoid attacking the other personally for his or her behaviour (i.e. criticize the behaviour and not the person); not doing so often leads to an escalating vicious spiral. It is helpful to look behind the other’s behaviour with such questions as, ‘I wonder what you think my reaction is to what you have said?’ or ‘I am really curious. What do you think this will gain for you?’ It is also sometimes useful to suggest to the other more appropriate means for pursuing his or her interests than the ones that he or she is currently using.

A phrase that we have found useful in characterizing the stance one should take in difficult (as well as easy) conflicts is to be ‘firm, fair, and friendly’. Firm in resisting intimidation, exploitation, and dirty tricks; fair in holding to one’s moral principles and not reciprocating the other’s immoral behaviour despite his or her provocations; and friendly in the sense that one is willing to initiate and reciprocate cooperation (for more extended discussions of dealing with difficult conflicts see Fisher et al. 1991).

Know yourself and how you typically respond in different sorts of conflict situations

As we have suggested earlier, conflict frequently evokes anxiety. Different people deal with their anxieties about conflict in different ways. Observe yourself to find out what sorts of conflicts make you anxious, what kind of behaviour by the other is particularly upsetting, and how you respond when you are anxious or upset.

Finally, throughout conflict, you should remain a moral person who is caring and just and should consider the other as a member of your moral community, entitled to care and justice

In the heat of conflict, there is often the tendency to shrink one’s moral community and to exclude the other from it: this permits behaviour toward the other that one would otherwise consider morally reprehensible (Opotow 1990, 1995). Such behaviour escalates conflict and turns it in the direction of violence and destruction.

Mediation in the schools

There are difficult conflicts that the disputing parties may not be able to resolve constructively without the help of third parties acting as mediators. In schools, such conflicts can occur between students, between students and teachers, between parents and teachers, and between teachers and administrators. To deal with such conflicts, mediation programmes have been established in a number of schools. These programmes vary, but typically students and teachers are given about 20 to 30 hours of training in the principles of constructive conflict resolution and specific training in how to serve as mediators. They are usually given a set of rules to apply during the mediation process. Students as young as 10 years old as well as high school and college students have been trained. Johnson and Johnson (1991) summarize what school mediators are expected to do:
The procedure for mediation consists of a series of steps. First, you end hostilities. Break up fights and cool down students. Second, you ensure that both people are committed to the mediation process. To ensure that both persons are committed to the mediation process and are ready to negotiate in good faith, the mediator introduces the process of mediation, sets the ground rules, and introduces him- or herself. Third, you help the two people negotiate with each other successfully. This includes taking the two persons through the negotiation sequence of (a) jointly defining the conflict by both persons stating what they want and how they feel, (b) exchanging reasons, (c) reversing perspectives so that each person is able to present the other's position and feelings to the other's satisfaction, (d) inventing at least three options for mutual benefit, and (e) reaching a wise agreement and shaking hands. Fourth, you formalize the agreement. The agreement is solidified into a contract. Disputants must agree to abide by their final decision, and in many ways the mediator becomes 'the keeper of the contract'.

Using constructive controversy to teach subject matter

Teachers, no matter what subjects they teach, can stimulate and structure constructive controversy in the classroom to promote academic learning and the development of conflict resolution skills (Johnson and Johnson 1987, 1992). A cooperative context is established for a controversy, for example, by assigning students to groups of four, dividing each group into two pairs who are assigned positions on the topics to be discussed, and requiring each group to reach a consensus on the issue and turn in a group report on which all members will be evaluated.

The discussion rules that students are instructed to follow during the controversy are

1. be critical of ideas, not people;
2. focus on making the best possible decision, not on winning;
3. encourage everyone to participate;
4. listen to everyone's ideas, even if you do not agree;
5. restate what someone has said if it is not clear;
6. bring out the ideas and facts supporting both sides and then try to put them together in a way that makes sense;
7. try to understand both sides of the issue; and
8. change your mind if the evidence clearly indicates that you should do so.

There is good reason to believe that such structured controversy not only makes the classroom more interesting but also promotes the development of perspective taking, critical thinking, and other skills involved in constructive conflict resolution. (see Johnson and Johnson 1992, 1995.)

_But what about competition?_

The major difference between controversy and constructive competition is that in controversy, people discuss their differences with the objective of clarifying their difference and attempting to find a solution that integrates the best thoughts that
emerge during the discussion, no matter who has articulated these thoughts. There is no winner and no loser; both win if during the controversy each party has come to deeper insights and enriched views of the matter that was initially in controversy. Constructive controversy is a process for constructively coping with the inevitable differences that people bring to tasks requiring coordination because it utilizes differences in understanding, perspective, knowledge, and world view as valued resources. In contrast, in competition there is usually a winner and a loser. The party who is judged to have 'the best'—ideas, skills, knowledge, and so on—typically wins, while the other who is judged to be less good typically loses. Competition evaluates and ranks people based on their capacity for a particular task rather than integrates various contributions.

Constructive competition

By our emphasis throughout this chapter, however, we do not mean to suggest that competition produces no benefits. Competition is part of everyday life. The acquisition of the skills necessary to compete effectively can be of considerable value. Moreover, competition in a cooperative, playful context can be fun. It enables one to enact and experience, in a non-serious setting, symbolic emotional dramas relating to victory and defeat, life and death, power and helplessness, dominance and submission; these dramas have deep personal and cultural roots. In addition, competition is a useful social mechanism for selecting those who are more able to perform the activities involved in the competition. Further, when no objective, criterion-referenced basis for measurement of performance exists, the relative performance of students provides a crude yardstick. Nevertheless, there are serious problems associated with competition when it does not occur in a cooperative context and when it is not effectively regulated by fair rules (see Deutsch 1973, pp. 377-88, for a discussion of the regulation of competition).

We suggest that competition can vary from destructive to constructive: unfair, unregulated competition being at the destructive end; fair, regulated competition being in between; and constructive competition being at the positive end. In constructive competition, the losers as well as the winners gain. Thus, in a tennis match that takes the form of a constructive competition, the winner will suggest ways that the loser can improve his/her game and provides an opportunity for the loser to learn and practice skills. In a constructive competition, the winner has the obligation to see that the loser is better off, or at least not worse off than he/she was before the competition.

Implementing programmes that help youth cope with conflict and violence

Dispute resolution training and curricula

Training programmes and curricula for teaching conflict resolution and violence prevention have been developed for adults as well as for children in elementary and secondary schools and even for preschool children (see Bodine and Crawford (1998)
institutions surveyed reported positive evaluations by each of the populations surveyed. Similar results are reported in evaluations made for school programmes in Ohio, Nevada, Chicago, New York City, New Mexico, Florida, and Texas (see Bodine and Crawford 1998). Most of the evaluations were based on questionnaires.

Some of the studies also focused on mediation training. Generally, very positive effects were found for the student mediators on their self-esteem as well as their conflict behaviour in and out of school as reported by their teachers and parents. Also, most of the disputants who participated in the mediation had positive reactions to it.

Supplementing the questionnaire studies, some of the schools reported on the training's effects on school violence, discipline problems, and other student behaviour. Some typical examples cited by Bodine and Crawford (1998) follow:

71 per cent of teachers involved in the evaluation of the New York City Resolving Conflict Creatively Program reported moderate or great decreases in physical violence in the classroom while 66 per cent observed less name calling and fewer verbal put-downs.

A mediation programme in a number of New York City high schools reported suspensions for fighting decreased by 46, 45, 70, 60, and 65 per cent in five of the high schools during the first year of the programme's operation.

The Peace Education Foundation Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Program in Dade County and Palm Beach County in Florida also indicates a significant decrease in referrals for disruptive behaviour. In one elementary school, referrals dropped from 124 between September and December in 1992 to five during the same period in 1994.

In addition, there is a very small body of systematic research (see Deutsch et al. 1992, and Johnson and Johnson 1989, 1995) which indicates that the students who participate in such programmes develop social skills, more self-esteem, a greater sense of personal control over their lives, higher academic achievement, and so on. However, it should be noted that the amount of high quality, systematic research of long enough duration has been very small. There have been few systematic studies of the effects of such programmes on youth violence.

An even more critical question has to do with what factors determine whether an effective training programme will be implemented successfully. Here, the concern of experienced practitioners is that effective programmes may be implemented fully or not at all, well, or poorly; they may endure or die out; they may spread throughout the system or be very confined; and so on.

Conflict resolution training can be thought of as an intervention that is meant to produce organizational change as well as individual change. There are a host of research questions that can focus on the factors influencing individual or organizational change or both. Elsewhere (Deutsch 1995b), one of us has discussed in greater detail the research issues facing the field of conflict resolution.

Clearly, there is a need for such research as well as much other research on conflict resolution training. But it would be a mistake to define the research issue in terms of whether such programmes can have an effect on the incidence of violence and destructive conflict. The research issue relevant to the effects of training is no longer whether such programmes can reduce violence and enhance constructive conflict resolution but rather what are the conditions under which these are likely to happen and what kinds of programmes are most effective.
Conclusion

Conflicts within and between school groups have constructive and destructive potential. The three most common school dispute resolution systems are peer mediation of students' interpersonal conflicts, administrative hearings for conflicts that are infractions of school rules, and union-based grievance systems for teacher-administrative conflict. All three systems are reactive rather than proactive, and together, address only a small subset of school-based conflicts. Conflict resolution systems in schools should be broader in scope, proactive, and seek to prevent destructive conflict. They can do this by encouraging all individuals and groups connected with the school not only to become skilled in constructive conflict management, but also to become alert to conflicts in their early stages before they have taken a destructive course. Helping to create a social atmosphere that facilitates open and constructive discussion of conflict stimulates problem solving and creative controversy.

Doing so is important for many reasons. First, conflicts are an important and underappreciated institutional resource. Conflicts can suggest ways to better foster individual development, promote organizational health, prevent professional and organizational stagnation, stimulate interest, curiosity, and engagement throughout the school community. Conflicts that emerge within a school community identify important institutional issues and suggest new ways of looking at and doing things. Second, students learn much about conflict management as bystanders to conflicts among other school groups. A school that is 'conflict positive', in that it exemplifies constructive conflict resolution in its everyday functioning, provides many opportunities for observational learning by students of the desirability of facing conflict and the skills for managing conflicts constructively. Third, teachers who employ constructive conflict resolution skills avoid the considerable drain of energy, talent, and enthusiasm that result from organizational conflict. Instead, they can channel their professional energy into pedagogical innovations that are personally rewarding and that also yield important personal and intellectual gains for students. Infusing constructive conflict resolution throughout the school is essentially a democratizing process because it takes the diverse perspectives within the school community seriously.

When students acquire attitudes and knowledge skills that foster constructive conflict resolution, it benefits them in numerous ways. It has immediate benefit in their relationships with family, friends, in their community, and with school staff. Conflict resolution training for students cannot, however, be an isolated programme within the schools. Adults also need to learn and acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills to resolve their own conflicts constructively so that they can model cooperation and constructive conflict resolution.

Among researchers investigating the effectiveness of conflict resolution programmes there is unanimity that students need at least 10-20 group lessons to change how they think and act. Stand-alone conflict resolution programmes for students, teachers, or administrators have positive value, but the full impact and long-term effects of conflict resolution programmes can be realized when schools undergo a fundamental change in their culture so that they come to value cooperation and constructive conflict resolution in the way they function on a daily basis and when interpersonal and intergroup
relationships among teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and students reflect these values.

Schools are uniquely positioned to help youth constructively manage the conflicts they experience. Developing creative, site-specific ways to surface, understand, and learn from the variety of conflicts that emerge within a school community can have very productive consequences for institutions, for the individuals involved with it, and for the larger community which includes the schools. Just as conflict from the community can intrude into the school, schools can be effective exporters of knowledge, attitudes, and conflict resolution skills when they approach their own conflicts constructively and collaboratively. Although the long-term research has not yet been done, it seems likely that the students who have experienced conflict-positive schools are more apt to cope constructively with the conflicts they face as adults in their various roles as spouses, parents, at work, and as citizens in their local, national, and world communities.

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