Resolving Conflicts On The Job

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The International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (ICCCR) at Teachers College is working with three sites of an alternative high school that have been chosen to participate in a longitudinal research project on the effects of training in cooperative learning and conflict resolution. The project is based upon extensive prior theoretical work and research by Deutsch (1949a, 1949b, 1973, 1985, 1989, 1990) and by Johnson and Johnson (1975, 1983, 1988, 1989).

One of the foci of interest in this investigation is based upon our assumption that schools do not typically prepare students well for the world of work. In schools, students do not commonly learn the skills of how to work together effectively with others in groups nor do they acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and techniques of managing conflicts constructively. Yet, many business leaders emphasize that these social skills are as crucial to success at work as technical expertise. In our project, we are studying the effects of training in cooperative learning and/or constructive conflict resolution on student work performance, as well as education achievement and psychological adjustment. We expect that such training would improve student work performance in a number of ways: they would have better relations with other workers as well as with their supervisors; they would have more patience and understanding for the populations whom they are serving; and they would less likely be

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fired for lateness or for failing to notify when they would be absent from work.

In this brief report, we focus on site “A”, where students were trained only in constructive conflict resolution (in site “B” they were trained only in cooperative learning, and in site “C” they were trained in both). In conflict resolution classes, students learn basic negotiation behaviors by using the **A-E-I-O-U** chart, a mnemonic device developed by the ICCCR project training director, Ellen Raider.

**A** stands for **ATTACK** behaviors (threatening, criticizing, or challenging).

**E** stands for **EVADE** (ignoring, withdrawing, or postponing).

**A** and **E** behaviors take people further away from resolving the conflict and often help to escalate the conflict.

**I-O-U** behaviors bring people closer to reaching an agreement.

**I** stands for **INFORM** (present feelings, reasons, positions).

**O** stands for **OPEN** (asking questions relating to needs, active listening and summarizing, being non-judgmental).

**U** stands for **UNITE** (establishing common ground, building rapport, proposing solutions).

By using **I-O-U** behaviors students are able to tell others what their needs are, get the other side to share their needs, and work towards finding a solution that meets the needs of both sides.

While teaching conflict resolution methods to students and staff at site “A” we found that students in the careers class began to grasp and utilize the ideas and skills involved in constructive conflict resolution. Thus, all students at site “A” maintained their internship positions and one third of the students obtained second jobs as their skill level rose. The students were able to reenact problems that they experienced on their jobs. Students would bring problems back to the classroom and role-play the conflict until they found a way to resolve it satisfactorily. The evidence
programs in this area. There are, however, as yet few programs, if any, in either vocational education or industry that are geared toward preparing non-supervisory employees to manage constructively the many conflicts that they will inevitably experience in the workplace.
REFERENCES


