



OJJDP FACT SHEET

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Conflict Resolution and the Arts

by Marianne Klink and Donna Crawford

At an arts-based delinquency prevention program in Newport, RI, troubled youth participated in a creative writing workshop. Their writing, like their lives, tended toward the graphic. Some students felt their creations were being censored when only selected works were published. The issue was precipitated by a poem about sexual abuse in which the poet described a fantasy of killing the abuser. "The students themselves were divided about whether the poem should be published, and it's fair to say they all wanted more voice in what was to be published, so we employed the group problem-solving process to come up with a solution," said Kate Hawley, program manager for Stopover Services of Newport. The process resulted in several options satisfactory to the group, including protecting the program's right to choose works for publication while informing students of other publishing opportunities.

The arts are a natural forum for teaching, modeling, and using conflict resolution (CR) processes. CR skills can provide tools for creating more peaceable environments within arts programs and within families, schools, and communities. As with the arts, CR education is approached experientially. One of the most powerful protective factors for youth is a caring, supportive relationship with an adult. Trustful relationships with artists offer youth opportunities to enliven hopes and dreams through art and to communicate their fears, problems, and frustrations. CR processes help complex and challenging youth-adult relationships to succeed.

Recognizing the natural affinity between CR education and the arts, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) collaborated in developing the Partnership for Conflict Resolution Education in the Arts. This national leadership initiative is designed to strengthen community-based arts programs for youth at risk of drug abuse and violence through professional development workshops on CR education. Participants include program administrators, artists, and representatives from collaborating organizations and youth and families served by the program.

CR education teaches skills needed for creative problem solving. Effective CR education invites individuals to understand multiple perspectives, identify interests, express points of view, and invent

solutions that provide for mutual gain. With understanding and skill, youth can become peacemakers who see conflict as an opportunity for learning and growth.

In 1997, the National Center for Conflict Resolution Education (formerly the Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution) conducted onsite workshops for nine arts-based youth programs. The training provided through this initiative was designed to teach CR skills and processes to artists, program administrators, and staff; enable arts organizations to infuse CR principles and processes into the design of their youth programs; and strengthen the partnerships between arts organizations and community groups that support youth programs.

The workshops focused primarily on helping program staff and artists develop and use CR skills. It is important that adults demonstrate the ability to resolve conflict appropriately to young people who are learning CR skills.

Methods for integrating CR education into arts programs were also presented. The 2-day training workshops drew heavily on the creative ability of the artists to make use of CR processes and principles in their work with youth. Through interactive, experiential learning activities, participants explored five CR learning modules: understanding conflict, tools for deescalating conflict, tools for resolving conflict, negotiation processes, and group problem-solving processes.

Experiences of the participating program sites showed that:

- ◆ When staff used CR techniques, relationships with youth clients improved. Staff developed a better understanding of conflict and of the reactions and behaviors of youth. Tools for deescalating conflict helped staff deal positively with unacceptable youth behavior.
- ◆ Many trained program staff reported that negotiation skills were useful with their colleagues and with youth in the program.
- ◆ Some sites made effective use of the group problem-solving strategy.
- ◆ Sites that engaged youth in CR activities prior to training improved the impact of the training.

- ◆ Most programs reported a need for further training on strategies for integrating CR into existing arts programs.
- ◆ All sites believed that staff training in CR was desirable and helpful. Those with extended and repeated involvement with individual youth (e.g., daily summer program, afterschool program) also believed that providing CR education for youth was viable.
- ◆ Where host programs included individuals from other community groups, a sense of collegiality developed among program staff and participants. (In Atlanta, for example, administrators from individual Boys & Girls Clubs who participated in the citywide arts program training were motivated to set up arts-based CR education programs within their clubs. Thus, there are now expanded community-based opportunities for youth to develop or practice constructive CR.)

The following organizations participated in the Partnership for Conflict Resolution Education in the Arts during 1997:

- ◆ Center for Modern Dance Education, Inc., Community Arts for Children At-Risk Program, Hackensack, NJ.
- ◆ Langston Hughes Cultural Arts Center, Seattle, WA.
- ◆ Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, Gallery 37 Program, Chicago, IL.
- ◆ Delaware Theatre Company, Wilmington, DE.
- ◆ San Jose Repertory Theatre, Red Ladder Theater Company, San Jose, CA.
- ◆ Stopover Services of Newport County, Inc., ARTS S.O.S., Middletown, RI.
- ◆ Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta, Youth Art Connection, Atlanta, GA.
- ◆ Arizona Commission on the Arts, A.P.P.L.E. Corps Program, Phoenix, AZ.
- ◆ Illusion Theater, Minneapolis, MN.

For Further Information

To learn more about the Partnership for Conflict Resolution Education in the Arts or to receive information on training and technical assistance to implement CR education programs, contact the National Center for Conflict Resolution Education, 110 West Main Street, Urbana, IL 61801, 217-384-4118; E-mail: info@nccre.org.

Resource Materials

In collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education's Safe and Drug-Free Schools Program, OJJDP has developed a guide to help schools, juvenile justice practitioners, and other youth-serving professionals and policymakers plan and implement CR education programs. For a copy of *Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Implementing Programs in Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings*, call the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse (JJC), 800-638-8736. The *Guide* is also available from OJJDP's home page: www.ncjrs.org/ojjhome.htm. A videotape of the OJJDP satellite teleconference Conflict Resolution for Youth: Programming for Schools, Youth-Serving Organizations, and Community and Juvenile Justice Settings is available from JJC for \$17, shipped to a U.S. address.

Artists in the Community: Training Artists to Work in Alternative Settings is a handbook designed for anyone developing, conducting, or hosting an arts program in a community setting. The handbook was produced as part of the YouthARTS Development Project, a national demonstration project supported by NEA, and is available from Americans for the Arts, Washington, DC, 202-371-2830 (phone) or 202-371-0424 (fax).

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