

THE IMPACT OF A SMALL SCALE CONFLICT RESOLUTION INTERVENTION PROGRAMME ON STUDENTS' CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

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Overview of Research

The main purpose of this research was to find a strategy to help students respond constructively to conflict and to develop their social competence skills. A conflict resolution intervention programme was implemented and the effect of the programme on students' conflict management skills was investigated.

Research Design and Methodology

An action research approach was adopted for the research over a five month period with a group of 22 sixth class mainstream female pupils in a disadvantaged area of Dublin. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a number of instruments. These included checklists, questionnaires, interviews, observation and a reflective journal. A conflict resolution programme was adapted and implemented. This involved teaching students to recognize that conflict had a value, to understand the five strategies for managing conflict, these being withdrawing, forcing, smoothing, compromising and problem-solving/negotiation. Students were also taught to refine and extend their negotiation skills by endeavouring to manage their conflicts as they arose. The intervention programme was taught in twelve one-hour lessons as part of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum using instruction, role play, debate and discussion. Insights derived from the study were discussed and reflected on in the light of the literature review conducted as part of the research. Ethical principles were adhered to by obtaining written permission from parents and students to conduct the research.

Findings

The evidence from this study demonstrates certain positive effects of conflict resolution education. Changes were found as students took more responsibility for conflict management, as students became more proactive in resolving conflicts and the number of conflict incidents showed a decrease. Beneficial results were also found as regards the effect of the intervention on students

with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Changes were noted in these children's use of sophisticated problem-solving language.

Conclusion

In the light of the positive effects of the research, the study suggests that a conflict resolution education module should perhaps be a formal part of the SPHE curriculum. The study makes a number of recommendations for teachers, students and for principals and policy makers. One recommendation made is that schools need to create safe, secure, empowering environments where young people can practise effective conflict resolution and autonomous decision making. Further lines of research are also indicated. A useful appendix outlines the adapted conflict resolution programme curriculum providing detail on the twelve lessons taught as part of the research.