

A Facilitation Case Study

By Stacey Daraio

INTRODUCTION

Below, we offer a brief facilitation case study regarding a request to assist a school in developing a conflict resolution program. I facilitated meetings with classroom teachers and youth. We hope that this case study illustrates some of the facilitation practices discussed in *Youth Work Fundamentals: Facilitation, A Briefing Paper For Afterschool Professionals*, which can be found under *Resources* on <http://expandedlearning360-365.com>.

THE REQUEST

Several years ago, the principal of an elementary school invited me to help them think through a problem they were having at school: the teachers were very upset about student conflict that was occurring and wanted a plan to help manage and reduce conflict.

My task: create a **facilitation plan** to help the adults and youth manage conflict. This meant structure the meetings that we would result with a plan that teachers felt motivated and excited to implement.

A few questions occurred to me:

- I know what I mean when I say conflict, I did not yet know what the teachers meant.
- How important was this to teachers?
- Had they worked on things together before? What was the desired outcome?

FACILITATION PLAN

I decided that to fully accomplish the goals, I needed to facilitate two separate meetings with the teachers. My meeting agenda plans are shown below.

Teacher Meeting I

Goals:

- Identify and agree on the areas of conflict
- A sense of urgency to create a plan that manages conflict

Welcome and Introductions

- Principal welcomes staff and provides some context on why we are having this meeting. A little bit about the history of the issue and the decision to create a plan.
- Introduce myself and ask the group to suggest **group agreements** that would enable everyone to feel safe and ensure their views openly; and get agreement on where we are headed.
- Next, we review the agenda.
- Warm-up: Show the photo (below) and ask the teachers to **reflect** on the photo. Ask: *Our work is difficult and filled with challenges. Can you say your name and describe an event, moment, or interaction that illustrates triumph in your work despite the challenges?*



Topic Clarification: Defining Conflict

- Brainstorm and agree: *What does conflict look like at school?*

(Teachers to individually write down on a piece of paper all the ways conflict shows up in their school. They will share their list with one other person. Pairs will be asked to identify 3 of the ways conflict shows up at school from both of their lists. The ideas from all the pairs will be posted on the wall and similar ideas will be combined).

- Put a scale on the wall from 1-5. Ask: *How important is it to you that conflict be resolved? 1 represents Not at All Important and 5 represents Extremely Important. Please stand by the number that best represents your answer.*
- Ask the teachers that are standing in the same spot to talk with each other about their reason for choosing that number.
- Ask for a representative from each group to speak about their reasoning.
- After all the groups have been heard, invite the teachers to change their position if they feel moved to do so.
- Check for level of agreement on the importance of resolving conflict.
- Ask: What will you do if conflict is not resolved?

Reflect and Close Meeting

- Review the work we have done together.
- Ask: What are the activities we have done today? What did you like? What didn't you like? What is the importance of what we have done today? What is one thing you want to remember from today when we meet again and create a plan?
- Open the floor up for teachers to share an appreciation.

Teacher Meeting II

Goals:

- Create a plan to manage conflict
- Excitement and motivation to implement the plan

Welcome and Introductions

- Welcome teachers.
- **Review group agreements**
- Invite them to sit for 3 minutes of mindfulness. Do breathing and a short body scan. Have teachers identify for themselves one moment they are grateful for in their day today.
- Review the agenda and get agreement on where we are headed today.

Review Work from Last Meeting

- Use a hand out that documents the work from the last meeting. Give teachers a few minutes to review the documentation.
- Ask: *What is one piece of information that stands out from the documentation? What are you really pleased to see listed? What is something that you forgot about? What is missing? How does the work we did last time point us in the direction of solutions? What is one thing you want to be sure is on our conflict management plan?*

Small Group Work

- Put teachers in self-selected groups around each of the areas of conflict identified.
- Have teachers fill out chart paper that answer the following **question**: *What is the happening around this area right now? What will be different in our school in one year if we mobilize around this area? What do we need to accomplish in the next 12 months?*
- Have groups report out on their charts.
- Discuss and get agreement on accomplishments in the next 12 months.
- For each accomplishment, teams complete a first quarter implementation plan, the steps needed in the next 90 days to complete the accomplishment.
- Teams report out their 90-day steps.

Reflect and Close Meeting

- Review the work we have done together.
- Ask: *What accomplishment are you most excited to see? Which one feels like it will be a real stretch? On which accomplishments have we already made some progress? How would you describe the emotional tone of the day? What are the next steps for our whole group?*
- Open the floor up for teachers to share an appreciation.

Results of the Teacher Meetings

The goals of both meetings were accomplished. We came up with 4 areas of conflict in the school:

- Verbal Disrespect: Student to Student;
- Verbal Disrespect: Student to Teacher;
- Property Disrespect; and,
- Physical Violence: Student to Student.

The teachers were unanimous in their agreement that the resolving conflict was Extremely Important. More than half the teachers said that if conflict wasn't resolved they would leave the school.

The plan to resolve conflict was robust and included things like reviewing and changing the discipline policy, parent meetings, teachers standing outside their classrooms and greeting children and parents in the morning and at the end of day, a welcome sign in multiple languages posted in the front of the school, a character curriculum implemented in each classroom with a character trait a month featured in school literature and assemblies, and a conflict management program with the students.

Conflict Management Planning With The Students

I was asked to facilitate the conflict management program with the students. It was a year-long process, but here's how I started. I worked with a group of 6th grade boys that the teachers had identified as the most responsible for conflict in the school. I met with them and told them that the adults in the school were concerned with conflict. I wondered if they were also concerned. They told me that they were definitely concerned.

I shared the areas of conflict that the teachers came up with and asked if they agreed with those areas, or if they didn't, what they might add. They agreed. I shared that the adults thought it might be a good idea to start a conflict management program and wondered what they thought about that idea. They thought it was a great idea, and were proud to be selected as the first group of conflict mediators.

Those eight 6th grade boys went through a weekend long conflict management training with me. Their siblings and parents were invited to attend as well as any teachers that wanted to attend and the principal. We got them special Conflict Manager vests, clip boards, and conflict management process worksheets. Together we did a presentation to the whole school that included role plays. We did a parent workshop to let them know about how we would be solving conflict at school and offering that they manage conflict in the same way at home.

We launched our program. At recess and at lunch conflict managers were available to discuss conflict! Then, the 6th grade girls asked if they could be conflict managers. So the 6th grade boys trained the 6th grade girls. And then, the 5th graders asked to be conflict managers.

Then the 4th graders, then the 3rd graders, 2nd graders, 1st graders – and last, but certainly not least – the kindergarteners approached me and told me that they had a BIG problem. I asked about that problem. They told me that when they were playing with the ball at recess and the ball accidentally rolled down the hill, they were not allowed to go get the ball and had to stop playing. I agreed that was a very BIG problem. I asked what they thought they could do about it. They told me that maybe they could learn to be ball monitors – and where ball monitor vests – and they could take turns and get the ball when it rolled down the hill. I told them that sounded like a very good idea and perhaps we should talk to their teacher about it and see what they had to say about it. We did talk to the teacher. We soon had Ball Monitors fetching runaway balls!

CONCLUSION

The result of coming together with groups of adults and youth around a problem and asking **questions** to get clear on a common understanding of that problem, ended in a fully implemented plan to manage conflict that included many elements of school policy, curriculum, student and parent engagement.

There is an abundance of resources regarding conflict resolution for youth. I have listed a couple below and you can find others by doing an online search for the keywords *conflict resolution for youth*.

- PeaceWorks <https://peaceeducation.org>
- Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Toolkit <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/node/resource/conflict-resolution-and-peer-mediation-toolkit.pdf>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper was authored by Stacey Daraio (Temescal Associates) and edited by Sam Piha (Temescal Associates). Thanks to our colleagues at the Expanded Learning 360°/365 project, and to the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation for their support of this paper.

About Temescal Associates

Temescal Associates is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development who are serious about improving the lives of young people. Our clients include leaders of youth serving institutions and organizations, school and youth program practitioners, public and private funders, intermediary organizations, and policy makers.

About the Expanded Learning 360°/365 Project

Expanded learning: 360°/365 is a collaborative project dedicated to promoting the development of critical skills beyond academics that research has identified as essential to young people's success in school, work, and life.