



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

Practice Opportunities for Peaceful Conflict Resolution

P.S. 24, New York • May 2009

Topic: Reducing Behavior Problems

Practice: Teach Skills

Highlights

- Emma Gonzalez, the mediation coach, trainer, and staff developer for P.S. 24, explains the purpose of the peer mediation program, defines “peace helpers,” and describes the benefits students receive from being mediators.
- Ms. Gonzalez defines and explains a Peace Corner, which is the major strategy used to teach students throughout the school how to solve minor problems in the classroom. To properly utilize the Peace Corner, students learn skills such as paraphrasing, non-judgement, impartiality, and leadership. These skills become inherent to them as they progress through the school.
- Mrs. Gonzalez elaborates on the schoolwide approach to teaching mediation skills and how it has evolved into a leadership model. Students become leaders and role models throughout the entire school.

About the Site

P.S. 24

Brooklyn, NY

Demographics

91% Hispanic

3% Asian

3% Black

3% White

94% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch

43% English Language Learners

P.S. 24 has several behavior management practices in place to maintain a safe, caring, and positive learning environment for students. Key elements of the schoolwide approach include:

- Teaching students to identify and manage their emotions;
- Social skills training including effective communication and conflict resolution skills;
- Designing and implementing “Peace Education,” a process for conflict resolution facilitated by peers;
- Helping students to develop cultural awareness through student-led Diversity Panel discussions; and
- Collaborating with families and community service organizations to support social-emotional learning.

Full Transcript

Emma Gonzalez: My name is Emma Gonzalez. I’m a Staff Developer/Trainer for the school P.S. 24 in Brooklyn, New York.

Student 1: And you guys shook on it, but you were still sad up to this day.

Student 2: Yes.

Gonzalez: Peer mediation is a time that we’re able to train our leaders in the school to help us create a more peaceful place.

Student 3: I shouldn’t say that to her.

Student 4: So, you said you’re still sad because...

Gonzalez: Peer mediation consists of about 17 steps that they have to learn, and it begins with introducing themselves and asking permission, if they want to be assisted in a problem. If they say no, they cannot do that. There are some ground rules, and the ground rules are very important because it asks them to work hard to solve the problem, not to interrupt each other, and not to do any put-downs. And that really is a basis for getting a buy-in so that the students who come to be mediated have an agreement that they will allow you to help them.

Student 1: Do you need my help?

Student 2: Yes.

Student 4: Do you need my help?

Student 3: Yes.

Student 1: These are some rules that you guys have to follow.

Student 4: No put-downs.

Student 1: No interrupting.

Student 4: And what is said in this room, stays in this room.

Student 1: Do you guys agree?

All: Yes.

Gonzalez: They do a lot of listening, and they paraphrase to make sure they understand. And other people feel good about having somebody impartially help them think through what the situations are and what they have done differently.

Student 2: What I could have done differently was just to go up to Susanna and tell her that you really...

Gonzalez: The conflict resolution programs have always considered a peace corner in the classroom a very important part to helping a teacher solve a quick little problem about pencils, about taking my seat, just minor things. We took it to another level in the school. What we decided was that every grade starting in kindergarten—and recently we added a pre-kindergarten, and one of our first recruits is a Pre-K student—to teach them the skills. And it's a modified version of a peace mediator. They have less steps, that's the only difference because they're not as complicated with their issues yet. But, it's the same foundation. They learn paraphrasing, which are the skills of being a very good listener, non-judgment, not telling people what to do, not bossing them around. They have to be impartial. They learn exactly what a mediator does.

[Cut to a small group of younger children.]

Student 1: You hit her, Annette, and you say why you did that.

Student 2: Because she always wanted to touch my teddy bear, but this teddy bear was expensive.

Student 3: I wanted the bear just like hers.

Student 4: So, you wanted an exact bear she had?

Student 3: Yes.

Student 4: How can you solve this problem?

Student 1: I know. We can just try to find another bear here in your room or somewhere else.

Student 4: Here you go [hands her another teddy bear.]

Gonzalez: We teach a host of about 60 children every year to be peer mediators, and the peace helpers we have about 250 already trained, and they work primarily in the classrooms. And the peer mediators can do classroom work in the classroom, but they also do it outside in the yard and in the lunch room.

[Cut back to first group of older elementary students.]

Student 1: How do you feel?

Student 2: I feel upset but sort of relieved.

Gonzalez: The program has evolved into a leadership model that has permeated the entire school. It has affected everyone from teachers, who began to see students in a different light, began to see other skills showing through.

[Cut to younger elementary student group.]

Student 4: Do you think we solved this problem?

Student 2: Yes, because by giving her a bear she won't fight for my bear.

Gonzalez: This is an opportunity to grow and provide an important role and to build good relationships, and so they see it as an opportunity that then they are not just looking at us to reprimand them for their behavior.