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# Designing Conflict Resolution Education: A Literature Review

Author: Geertje Agricola

Student number: 3224554

First supervisor UU: Lennart Vriens

Second supervisor UU: Frans Prins

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## **Designing Conflict Resolution Education:**

### **A Literature Review**

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#### ***Abstract***

In this review, guidelines and preconditions for effective conflict resolution education are examined. Conflict is defined as a situation in which at least one of two or more interdependent parties perceives interfering and incompatible actions, interests, wishes or needs between them. Conflict resolution entails the process of solving a conflict in which a constructive approach is the most preferable way to come to a solution. According to scientific publications, conflict resolution education can be applied through negotiation, mediation, controversy, and general training. The ability to reverse perspectives during a conflict and problem-solving skills should be vital elements of conflict resolution programs. Designing effective conflict resolution education requires a broad approach which encompasses a long-term process, as well as multiple forms of conflict resolution applied simultaneously and an informal curriculum and context which do not contradict with the goals of conflict resolution.

#### **Introduction**

There is increasingly more attention for conflict resolution in the Dutch educational system. This is, among other reasons, caused by the rise of random violence, the occurrence of conflicts as a result of by diversity in a multicultural society and the occurrence of a number of serious violent crimes at schools. This contributes to the idea that the number of crimes and conflicts in society increases. Whether this is truly the case is hard to say. Statistics differ on this subject, primarily due to the diverse and constantly changing definitions of ‘violence’, ‘crime’ and ‘conflict’ (Vriens, 2006). It is also easy to misperceive the number of conflicts in society, because serious conflicts that involve anger and violence are more salient and more likely to be remembered by people (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). But despite this possible bias, violence and conflict do seem to be a big part of the lives of today’s youth and of minority groups (ECCP, 2003). Therefore, many schools see reasons to teach children how to deal with conflict through conflict resolution education.

However, designing effective conflict resolution education is not that simple. In the last decades, a large amount of research on conflict resolution education has been published. This can cause problems in designing this type of education, because this large amount can make it difficult to gain insight into its concept. Therefore, it is beneficial for educational designers to have an overview of the possibilities and preconditions for designing effective

conflict resolution education. Also, when combining the research of the last years, it is possible to draw new conclusions from previous studies and to define possible research gaps. Hence, this review focuses on the question: *What are, according to scientific theory, the guidelines and preconditions for designing conflict resolution education?*

The research for this study focused on conflict resolution education in schools as a part of the formal and informal curriculum. The goal of conflict resolution education is to reduce the possible disruption and harm that may arise when conflicts are mismanaged, for instance when a conflict is managed in a destructive manner. Conflict resolution education helps students and educators to develop skills and inclinations that support constructive nonviolent conflict resolution (Bickmore, 2002). Conflict resolution in schools is primarily concerned with conflicts between two or more persons (interpersonal conflict), because students' conflicts are primarily with each other and with adults, such as teachers and parents (Hutchinson, 1996). Common conflicts that occur in schools are verbal harassments (name calling, insults), verbal arguments, rumors and gossip, physical fights, and dating or relationship issues (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

Interpersonal conflict in schools is perceived to be an incidental situation between persons. Conflict resolution programs which focus on structural conflicts, such as bullying or discrimination at school, are excluded from this research because these types of conflict are different in nature: they occur systematically, are persistent, can seriously harm students, and often consist of a power-imbalance between parties. These types of conflict cannot be solved constructively by students themselves. Structural conflicts need different and additional methods to be resolved (Vriens, 2006).

There is a strong relation between conflict resolution education and several different types of educational programs, such as social skills or social competence programs, peace education, citizenship education, and democracy education. Conflict resolution relates to these programs in its mutual goals to stimulate social development (social skills or social competence programs), creating a peaceful and conscious environment (peace education), and stimulating responsibility and empowerment among students (citizenship education and democracy education). Constructive conflict resolution is also often a sub element of these programs. But despite of these similarities, research focused on programs in which the main goal was to teach students how to constructively solve conflicts. The goals mentioned above are strong motivators to implement conflict resolution education and also emphasize the possible positive outcomes of this type of education, but they are not the prime focus of conflict resolution programs.

In addition, conflict resolution education has a strong connection with educational programs focusing on anti-violence. These programs emphasize constructive conflict resolution in order to prevent the use of violence during conflict. Conflict resolution

education also supports a non-violent approach to preventing destructive conflict. However, conflict resolution programs claim that a conflict can also be destructive without the use of violence: when participants in a conflict are dissatisfied with its outcomes, it is already considered to be destructive. Conflict resolution education therefore does not solely focus on non-violent approaches, but on constructive approaches in general, including non-violence.

## **Research method**

This research was conducted through a number of systematic steps. These steps reflected a top-down approach: the research started with a global overview of the subject, and then each subsequent step added more detail to the subject and divided it into subcomponents which also became increasingly detailed.

First, a global orientation on the subject of conflict and moral education was conducted in order to gain insight into the complexity and scope of this subject. A content expert, with a substantial amount of experience in the field of conflict and peace education, provided insight into the latest developments in this domain. He also provided a number of names of authors, institutions, and leads for possible research questions. This information contributed to the formulation of key words which were used as search entries in the catalogue for books and print publications, as well as in Omega, the database for electronic publications at the library of the University of Utrecht. This resulted in a number of scientific books and articles which were read and analyzed. The resulting information was used to formulate research questions and to construct a research plan.

At this point, it seemed best to focus on conflict resolution education because moral education was too broad in scope to cover in this review. The research focused on conflict resolution in schools as a part of the formal and informal curriculum. Conflict resolution in schools had to focus on helping students to develop skills and inclinations to constructively solve conflicts, in school or non-school situations. Conflict resolution in general is an extremely broad subject which is quite thoroughly researched in psychology and sociology. However, not all these research findings lead to educational implications relevant for this research. Publications on resolution which focus on conflicts between large groups or nations were also excluded from this study. These types of conflict do not apply to school settings.

The second step included the formulation of key words and search entries in order to answer the research question. The key words were again used to search the catalogue and the database of the Utrecht University library. These sources are adequate given the aim of the review to focus on scientific theory published in books and articles in scientific journals. Search entries in the database for electronic publications which yielded relevant results were:

‘conflict resolution education’ (more than 500 hits, of which 124 with all key words); ‘conflict prevention education’ (more than 500 hits, of which 31 with all key words); ‘resolve conflict schools’ (more than 500 hits, of which 63 with all key words); and “‘conflict management’ education’ (more than 500 hits, of which 2 with all key words). Search entries in the catalogue for books and print publications which yielded relevant results were: ‘conflict resolution education’ (4 hits); ‘constructive conflict’ (6 hits); and ‘interpersonal conflict resolution’ (11 hits). Picarta, the Dutch catalogue for books and print publications, was also used in the search process. However, this did not result in additional, relevant publications.

The results of the search entries were selected according to relevance for the research question. This means that the publication had to include preconditions or guidelines for effective conflict resolution education. The publication had to state how the author came to this conclusion, preferably by describing which criteria and what kind of measures were used.

The first search entry in Omega already yielded a large amount of leads on specific authors and their guidelines and preconditions. Publications about these specific theories and guidelines were also retrieved in Omega or in the catalogue according to their specific search entry (name of the author, or title of the publication, or the title of journal in combination with the date or number of the relevant issue) and were then analyzed. The results of the search entries were analyzed through reading and taking notes. The relationships between different subjects, guidelines, and preconditions were visualized in a mind map. The references in the publications were examined to see which theories and guidelines on this subject were most frequently used in the design of conflict resolution education. The frequent use of specific theories and principles is presumably a sign that these theories are perceived as guidelines or important preconditions. The number of citations of the publications of these possible guidelines and preconditions was checked in Google Scholar.

Initially, the primary focus was on conflict resolution education based on interpersonal conflict. However, when analyzing the publications, it became clear that conflict in schools is also closely linked with conflict within one person (intrapersonal or cognitive conflict), which can benefit the learning process. Consequently, the subsequent research focused not only on interpersonal conflict, but on intrapersonal conflict in school settings as well.

Once an overview of the subject and its subparts was constructed, the final step in the research consisted of finding more information on those subparts which needed clarification. These topics were: mediation; peer mediation; controversy; cognitive or intellectual conflict; and bullying. The search entries in Omega which yielded relevant results were ‘mediation conflict resolution education’ (more than 500 hits, of which 50 with all key words); “‘peer mediation’ conflict resolution education’ (more than 500 hits, of which 9 with all key words); ‘controversy conflict resolution education’ (more than 500 hits, of which 2 with all key

words); “‘intellectual conflict’ conflict resolution education’ (more than 500 hits, of which 2 with all key words); and ‘bullying conflict education’ (more than 500 hits, of which 1 with all key words). One search entry in the catalogue for books and print publications yielded relevant results: ‘controversy education’ (9 hits). The results were again selected according to relevance and analyzed.

## **Conflict**

### *Defining conflict*

There are many misconceptions on the meaning of conflict and its possible consequences. It is important for educational designers to clearly define their perceptions and definitions of conflict in order to prevent irregularities in the design of conflict resolution education.

The most influential definition of conflict is stated by Morton Deutsch (1973), who states that a conflict exists when incompatible activities occur. This means that the action of one group or person attempting to reach his or her goals prevents, obstructs, interferes with or injures the action of another group or person, or makes the action less likely or less effective, in attempting to reach his or her goals. Many theorists on conflict resolution education agree with this definition, although there are some differences. David Johnson and Roger Johnson (1996), for example, perceive the definition of Deutsch as the description of a conflict of interests in which incompatible interests exist. Allan Filley (1975) also places an emphasis on interests by stating that in a conflict the interests of the parties are mutually exclusive. Kathy Bickmore (2002), on the other hand, focuses on the divergent wishes or needs of the conflicting parties which lead to disagreements and problems. Overall, many theories emphasize the interference of actions, interests, wishes or needs between parties which causes conflict to occur.

Conflicts can occur within one person (intrapersonal), group or nation or between two or more persons (interpersonal), groups or nations (Deutsch, 1973). Conflict is most often perceived as involving two or more parties. These parties are also interdependent of each other (Hocker & Wilmot, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 1996) According to Joyce Hocker and William Wilmot (1995), conflict is a mutual activity in which the choices of each person affect the other person. A person who is not dependent upon another person’s actions or interests has no reason for conflict with that other person. When the parties are interdependent, the differences in their actions and interests cannot coexist if both want to achieve their goals.

The definition of Evert van de Vliert (1997) entails a certain reaction on a conflict: “Individuals are in conflict when they are obstructed or irritated by another individual or a

group and inevitably *react* to it in a beneficial or costly way” (Vliert, 1997, p.5). This fits with the definition of Hocker and Wilmot (1995) who state that conflict is an *expressed* struggle. Although many theorists emphasize that conflict inevitably leads to some kind of reaction, a reaction does not seem to be a precondition for the occurrence of a conflict. A common general definition of conflict states that a situation is already a conflict if one of the parties perceives the situation as a conflict (Giebels & Euwema, 2006). This seems to be true in the sense that interference - between actions, interests, wishes or needs - can already exist without a reaction of one of the parties towards it. Therefore, a reaction does not seem to be a necessity for the presence of a conflict. Perception, on the other hand, does seem to be important.

The importance of perception in conflict is often emphasized in conflict theories (Deutsch, 1973; Filley, 1975; Hocker & Wilmot, 1995). Deutsch (1973) states that the perception of the parties involved determines if they experience a conflict and what course of action they take in order to resolve it. It also determines whether the disputing parties use promotive or oppositional patterns of interaction (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). If conflict is defined in terms of incompatible goals and different values, such differences are frequently perceived rather than real (Filley, 1975). Hocker and Wilmot (1995) emphasize this point by stating that “Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who *perceive* incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals” (Hocker & Wilmot, 1995, p.21). In other words, the perception of the parties involved, and not the actual state of affairs, determines the presence and the course of a conflict.

In sum, conflict entails the following elements: (1) there are incompatible actions, interests, wishes or needs which interfere with each other; (2) it includes two or more parties; (3) the parties are interdependent of each other; and (4) at least one of the parties perceives the situation as to be a conflict. Therefore, conflict can be defined as *a situation in which at least one of two or more interdependent parties perceives interfering and incompatible actions, interests, wishes or needs between them.*

#### *Different kinds of conflict*

A conflict can either be destructive or constructive, according to the perception of the disputants (Deutsch, 1973). A conflict is destructive if its participants are dissatisfied with the outcomes and feel they have lost as a result of the conflict. A conflict is constructive if the participants are all satisfied with the outcomes and feel that they have gained as a result of it. Johnson and Johnson (1996) state that, in addition to satisfaction with the outcomes, constructive conflict also improves the relationship between the disputants, as well as their ability to resolve future conflicts in a constructive manner. In reality, a conflict is rarely only

destructive or constructive, but it seems preferable for both conflicting parties to strive for constructive consequences as much as possible.

Conflict can also be distinguished according to the relationship between the objective state of affairs and the state of affairs as perceived by the conflicting parties (Deutsch, 1973). In this sense, there are six different types of conflict: veridical, contingent, displaced, misattributed, latent, and false conflict. Veridical conflict, also called ‘true conflict’, exists objectively and is perceived accurately by the conflicting parties. It is not contingent upon an easily altered feature of the environment. For example, a child wants to read a certain book and another child wants to read that book at the same time as well. When there is not another copy of the book available, the children have a ‘true conflict’. A contingent conflict exists when the conflict depends on readily rearranged circumstances, but these are not recognized by the conflicting parties. The contingent conflict would disappear if the available alternative resources for satisfying the conflicting needs were recognized. The preceding example of a veridical conflict will be classified as a contingent conflict when there is actually another copy of the book available, so both children can read the book at the same time. In displaced conflict, the parties are arguing about something else than the actual conflict. This relates to manifest conflict and underlying conflict in which the experienced conflict is a manifest conflict and the conflict that is not directly expressed is the underlying conflict. The manifest conflict usually expresses the underlying conflict in some form. In misattributed conflict, the conflict is between the wrong parties because one or both of the parties misattributes something to the other. As a result, the conflict is usually about the wrong issues. Latent conflict is a conflict that should be occurring but is actually not, for example when a person is not yet consciously experiencing the situation as a conflict. False conflict is the occurrence of a conflict when there is no objective basis for it, because of misperception or misunderstanding (Deutsch, 1973).

Johnson and Johnson (1979) distinguish two additional types of conflict which are often used in schools: controversy and cognitive conflict (also known as conceptual conflict). Controversy exists when a person’s ideas, information, conclusions, theories, or opinions are incompatible with those of another person, and both seek to reach an agreement (Johnson & Johnson, 1979). Controversies are resolved by engaging in deliberate discourse. This entails a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of proposed actions aimed at synthesizing novel solutions (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). For example, controversy can be about the pros and cons of civil disobedience in a democracy. Closely related to controversy is cognitive conflict, which exists when two incompatible ideas exist simultaneously within a student’s mind and must be reconciled (Johnson & Johnson, 1979). For example, a child who believes that the world is flat, while his or her teacher says the world is round. The child now has two incompatible, and thus conflicting, ideas within his or her mind: the earth is round versus the



earth is flat. Cognitive conflict is discussed in further detail in the paragraph ‘The positive effects of conflict’.

*What causes and increases conflict*

Deutsch (1973) states that conflicts generally concern four types of issues. First, conflict can concern issues on control over resources which are perceived to be non-shareable, such as space, money, property, power, prestige, food, and so forth. Second, conflict can also arise over preferences and nuisances, which means that the activities or tastes of one person or group impinge upon another’s preferences, sensitivities, or sensibilities. Third, values and beliefs can induce conflict. The claim that certain values should dominate or be applied in general, even by those who hold different values, can cause conflict. Beliefs are about what one perceives to be reality. If the perception of reality of one person differs from that of another person, this can cause conflict. Finally, the relationship between parties can evoke conflict when, for example, two people have opposing views and desires in their relationship (Deutsch, 1973).

According to Filley (1975), there are several conditions which can increase the occurrence of conflict in social relationships: ambiguity of the limits each party’s jurisdiction, conflicting interests, separation of parties from each other either physically or with respect to time which causes communication barriers, dependency of one party upon the other, parties wanting to make joint decisions, a need for consensus, imposing behaviour regulation on one of the parties, and the presence of unresolved prior conflict. These conditions may not always lead directly to conflict, but they can create opportunities for conflict to arise.

There are several processes which can cause a conflict to escalate into a destructive conflict. Competitive processes in an attempt to win the conflict can cause the communication between the disputing parties to be unreliable and impoverished. It also leads to a suspicious and hostile attitude, and it stimulates the view that the solution of the conflict can only be imposed by one side or the other. Processes of misperception and biases in perception cause an inaccurate image of the actual state of affairs and can transform a conflict into a competitive struggle. Processes of commitment to a position or opinion, as a result of pressures for cognitive and social consistency (also known as cognitive dissonance), can cause intensification of conflict because one’s actions have to be justified to oneself and to others (Deutsch, 1973). Forces that can sustain conflict are trained incapacities, climate, power, and face-saving behaviours (McFarland, 1992).

According to Johnson and Johnson (1996) there is not enough information about the specific events that trigger conflict and the barriers that prevent it from occurring. There are not many studies about conflict in schools that, for example, examine the factors that influence aggressive behaviour, although it is generally agreed upon that the psychological

experience of arousal contributes strongly to aggression, which can evoke destructive conflicts. Therefore, it seems important for educators to also examine the possible factors that induce aggression in schools such as frustration and anger among students, and also factors like crowding, temperature and the presence of aggressive individuals who are perceived as role models (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

*The positive effects of conflict*

Many people associate conflict with fighting, struggle, and violence. In this matter, it is important to be aware of the difference between a conflict issue and conflict behaviour (Van der Vliert, 1997). A conflict certainly contains some kind of social behaviour, but the conflict itself is not the same as its reaction towards it. Conflict behaviour leads to certain results, and the value of those results can be either favorable or unfavorable (Filley, 1975). Unfavorable results can be agitation, aggression, or violence. In schools, unfavorable results of poorly managed conflicts may include lower achievement and detrimental effects on individual students, such as stress, and challenges to self-esteem and self-efficacy (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

Contrary to what many people think, conflict can also have favorable results. For example, it can stimulate group cohesiveness: conflict demarcates groups from one another and as such helps to establish group and personal identities. External conflict with an other group therefore fosters internal cohesiveness (Deutsch, 1973, McFarland, 1992, Filley, 1975). Conflict also supports the balance of power between parties, stimulates creative approaches to problem solving, leads to the diffusion of more serious conflict by airing and handling problems in time and stimulates a search for new facts or solutions which fosters creativity (Deutsch, 1973; McFarland, 1992). For children and teenagers, conflict with and detachment from parents is necessary for encouraging individuation, realigning relationships, and reducing anxieties (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). But above all, conflict is mainly a motor for personal and social change. For instance, conflict can help to establish social change by revitalizing existing norms and to contribute to the emergence of new norms (Deutsch, 1973, McFarland, 1992, Filley, 1975). In the Netherlands, for example, the increase of immigrants in the last couple of decades has forced society to reexamine their norms about immigration.

The power to establish personal change through conflict is especially helpful in school settings; development through intrapersonal conflict is a very common subject among cognitive theorists. The theory of Jean Piaget (1950) on cognitive development, for example, emphasizes the role of conflict through equilibrium in the development of new cognitive structures (Driscoll, 2005). According to this theory, cognitive conflict results in internal disequilibrium and the inability to assimilate current experiences into existing cognitive structures. This creates the need to organize the learner's cognitive structures in a new way in

which s/he moves from one stage of cognitive reasoning to another (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). Conflict is consequently the mechanism by which children and adolescents acquire new cognitive structures, develop new perspectives and shift to new stages of reasoning which result in changes in behaviour toward parents and peers (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

Closely resembling the theory of Jean Piaget is the idea of conceptual change in which educators try to change the mental concepts of learners by creating dissatisfaction with an existing concept, such as in the example of the child who has two contrasting ideas about the world. This process is induced by, for instance, exposing the learner to contrasting analogies, metaphors, and physical models (Driscoll, 2005). Intrapersonal conflict is also an important part in Jerome Bruner's (1961) ideas on discovery learning. Bruner emphasizes that in discovery learning it is important to present the learner with materials or events which are discrepant to what s/he or she already knows (Driscoll, 2005; Johnson & Johnson, 1995). This will lead to cognitive conflict, which sets the stage for discovery by stimulating the learner to explore contrasts (Driscoll, 2005).

Interpersonal conflicts can have benefits for schools as well. Interpersonal conflict through the use of controversy can result in positive relationships among students as well as increased motivation to learn, enjoyment of the instructional experience, and perceptions of encouragement and support among students (Johnson & Johnson, 1985). Conflicts between students in general focus attention on problems to be solved, clarify disputants' identity and values, reveal how disputants need to change, create curiosity, and stimulate higher quality problem solving in a group (Johnson & Johnson, 1995; 2004).

Although there may be concerns among educators about the negative outcomes of conflicts, such as aggression and violence, conflict itself is not a negative process. It is an essential part of life and a necessary and inevitable aspect in human and social development (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). It is therefore important not to avoid conflict in schools, but to stimulate the possible positive outcomes and to create a positive attitude towards conflict.

## **Conflict resolution**

### *What is conflict resolution?*

Conflict resolution entails the process of solving a conflict. The most preferable way to solve a conflict is through constructive conflict resolution, because then all the participants are satisfied with the outcomes of the resolution and feel they have gained something as a result of the conflict (Deutsch, 1973). In constructive conflict resolution, the conflict should not harm, but create benefits and positive outcomes for the relationship between the parties. In other words, the conflict should create a win-win solution (Davidson & Wood, 2004; Filley,

1975). Win-win solutions are often possible given the fact that most conflicts involve disagreements of means rather than ends; the parties perceive the conflict to be ‘my way’ versus ‘your way’, while both parties strive for the same thing (Filley, 1975). For example, two students are arguing about how to solve a math problem. They both have a different perception of the right approach to solve the problem, but their end (solving the math problem) is the same.

There are three possible processes for conflict resolution. These are negotiation, mediation, and attribution. Negotiation is a process in which persons who have shared and opposed interests want to come to an agreement and try to work out a settlement (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Negotiation can be handled in a distributive or an integrative manner. The distributive approach is based on the belief that you can only maximize your own gain at the expense of the other. The integrative approach is based on maximizing the gains for both parties (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). In integrative negotiations, both the goal that one wants to reach and the relationship with the other party is highly valued. Therefore, the parties seek to reach an agreement that ensures that both parties fully achieve their goals and that any tensions and negative feelings are resolved. Johnson and Johnson (1996) perceive this to be the most constructive strategy to resolve a conflict. This seems true, because the integrative approach is focused on maximizing the gain for both parties, which is also the goal of constructive conflict resolution.

When the disputing parties cannot resolve the conflict by negotiating themselves, mediation can be an option. Mediation is the process in which an unbiased third party (the mediator) assists disputants to negotiate an integrative resolution to their conflict (Bickmore, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). A common form of mediation is peer mediation in which the mediator is a peer of the conflicting parties. The peer mediator is responsible for guiding the resolution process, by assisting peers to communicate with one another and to negotiate a solution to their own problems (Bickmore, 2001).

The third process is arbitration. Arbitration is the submission of a dispute to a disinterested third party who makes a final and binding judgment as to how the conflict will be resolved. Arbitration is commonly used as a last resort when negotiation and mediation have failed to resolve the conflict. The process of arbitration is particularly applicable in schools: when mediation fails, the teacher or administrator often arbitrates the conflict (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; 1995). Learning how to arbitrate is, however, not a means of conflict resolution education since its goal is to teach students and educators skills and inclinations to resolve conflicts themselves. In arbitration, the arbitrator decides who is right and who is wrong and decides what the solution should be. Arbitration is also not a constructive approach to conflict resolution because it is likely that at least one of the

disputing parties does not agree with the solution and feels that s/he has lost as a result of the conflict.

#### *Conflict prevention and conflict management*

One approach to conflict resolution is conflict prevention. Conflict prevention aims at preventing unnecessary conflict. Educational programs which focus on conflict prevention are designed to teach students what conflict is, offer alternatives to violent conflict resolution, and give attention to aspects which can influence the occurrence and the escalation of conflict, such as social skills, empathy training, stress and anger management, attitudes about conflicts, and bias awareness (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Conflict in itself, as stated earlier, is neutral in nature and can have very positive influences. The term conflict prevention therefore can seem misplaced, but aspects as social skills, empathy and stress can certainly influence if a conflict takes a destructive or a constructive course. It is therefore important in the design of education aimed at conflict prevention, to focus on the unnecessary escalation of conflict, and not to proclaim a negative image of conflict.

Since conflict prevention can influence the course of a conflict, conflict prevention is closely linked with conflict management, that is, the ability to manage a conflict constructively. Conflict management focuses on the necessary skills and attitudes to come to a constructive resolution and, in this review, is seen as an aspect which is inherently included in conflict resolution education.

### **The content of conflict resolution education**

In the previous sections, it has become clear that conflict can have very positive consequences. A constructive approach to conflict can even create benefits for all the parties involved. The design and implementation of conflict resolution education on the other hand is not a one-way process. Research shows that there are several different ways to apply conflict resolution education and that there are several preconditions to make conflict resolution work. A number of ways to realize conflict resolution education are discussed below.

#### *Negotiation*

Two well-known forms of conflict resolution education are negotiation and mediation. These two processes are often combined in educational programs in order for students to be capable of resolving their own conflicts (negotiation) and help with the conflicts of others (mediation). Negotiation logically precedes mediation because negotiation skills are necessary for the realization of a constructive mediation process.

Negotiation, as stated earlier, entails the process by which persons who want to come to an agreement try to work out a settlement (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). This can be realized through a distributive or an integrative approach. The integrative approach, or integrative problem-solving negotiation, is perceived to be the best strategy to resolve a conflict, because disputants then work together to create an agreement that benefits everyone involved. Therefore, most negotiation programs focus on integrative negotiation procedures.

To negotiate an integrative agreement, students need to: (1) define their conflict; (2) exchange positions and proposals; (3) view the situation from both perspectives; (4) invent options for mutual gain; and (5) reach a wise agreement (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). According to Johnson & Johnson (*ibid*), negotiation training should teach students problem solving procedures, the ability to communicate honestly, and the ability to take the opposing perspective. They also believe that the integrative negotiation skills learned during the training should be practiced until they become automatic habit patterns. This seems logical because a student can be confronted with unexpected conflict at all times. The conflict likely requires a quick response of the student. If that response should be a constructive one, then this response should be a habit to the student on which he immediately acts. Or as Johnson and Johnson (2004) state: “If students have to stop and think what they should do, it may be too late to manage the conflicts constructively” (Johnson and Johnson, 2004, p.73)

Hocker and Wilmot (1995) state that it is important to learn to engage in conflict rather than to avoid it. This fits with the possible positive consequences of conflict which are not reached by avoiding the conflict. Avoidance can even have destructive consequences because it can cause frustration and can negatively affect the relationship between the parties. Hocker and Wilmot (*ibid*) also state that it is important to resist using domination or power-over tactics in the negotiation process. This applies to integrative negotiation because in this approach the goal of both parties and the relationship between them is highly valued.

#### *Mediation and peer mediation*

Mediation is the process in which an unbiased third party (the mediator) assists disputants to negotiate an integrative resolution to their conflict. Peer mediation is mediation in which the third party is a peer of the disputants. The mediation procedure consists of the following steps. First, when the mediator notices a conflict, he ends the hostilities and gives the disputants time to cool off. Second, the mediator establishes each participant’s voluntary and independent consent to participate and to keep the proceedings confidential. The mediator also explains the procedure of the mediation process. Third, the mediator facilitates the negotiation process by assisting the participants to communicate together during the negotiation steps: defining the conflict, exchanging reasons, reversing perspectives, inventing options and reaching an agreement. In the last step, the mediator formalizes the agreement

and closes the mediation process (Bickmore, 2001; 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1994). According to Clark (1994), cooperation, social equity, and open communication and mutual respect are essential elements to achieve a constructive solution to a conflict. Consequently, he believes that necessary skills for mediators include the ability to encourage disputants to cooperate with each other, the ability to maintain a norm of equity between the parties, and identifying clear and specific issues to clarify the nature of the conflict and prohibiting accusations, labeling, and insults (Clark, 1994).

Although the mediation process itself may sound easy, there are several situations in which mediation does not contribute to a constructive solution. For example, when there is a high level of hostility between the disputants, the mediator is distrusted, there is a lack of resources to create a solution, the disputants are uncommitted to mediation, or the disputants have unequal power (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Mediation therefore does not seem suitable for every type of interpersonal conflict between students. Other approaches might then be more appropriate.

In schools, peer mediation is a common form of conflict resolution education, because it can be easily implemented with low costs (Cunningham, et al., 1998). Peer mediation usually consists of two segments: the mediation training and the execution of the mediation itself. The first part requires preparation and time in the standard curriculum. Follow-up training sessions are important to refresh and rehearse the mediation skills (Cunningham, et al., 1998). The mediation process itself, on the other hand, requires only the participation and time of students themselves. A common way to approach peer mediation is that the teacher points out two different class mediators on a daily or weekly basis. These mediators are responsible for mediating the conflicts between their peers, especially during breaks and lunchtime. At the start of the implementation of peer mediation, Johnson and Johnson (2004) recommend to make students mediate in pairs in order to gain confidence in their mediation skills. Clark (1994) on the other hand, states that mediation generally always takes place in pairs. Whether or not mediation should take place in pairs probably depends on the number of conflicts to be handled by the mediators: if multiple conflicts occur at the same time, then it is likely that the mediation pair will split up to mediate as many conflicts as possible. To mediate alone also stimulates more empowerment and a sense of responsibility of the student than when he mediates in pairs. At the beginning of a mediation program, however, it is likely that mediators will gain self-assurance in helping and supporting each other in the mediation process, especially when the mediation skills have not yet become automatic habit patterns.

Peer mediation can have very positive effects on students and the school climate. Cunningham and colleagues (1998) conducted research on the effectiveness of a student-mediated conflict resolution program on primary school playground aggression and found that

approximately 90% of the disputes in which mediators intervened were resolved successfully (i.e. came to an agreement). The introduction of playground mediation also reduced physically aggressive playground behaviour (such as taking equipment from peers, pushing other students, or hitting) by 51% to 65%. Observations showed that this reduction was also maintained in the following year. In their review on conflict resolution research, Johnson and Johnson (1996) also found that mediation programs generally have a high success rate. After participating in David Johnson's Teaching Students to be Peacemakers-program (TSP), 92% of the second- through sixth-grade students knew all the steps of the integrative negotiation procedures, and 94% of the students knew the steps of the mediation procedures. Eight months after the training, 92% of the students were still able to write out from memory all the integrative negotiation and mediation steps. It should be noted that the negotiation procedure of the TSP program consists of six steps and the mediation procedure of four steps, which is not a large amount of information to remember. It is also not clear if the exact same group of students was involved in both tests. Johnson and Johnson (1996) also found that students are able to apply the negotiation and mediation procedures in conflict situations, and are able to transfer the procedures to non-classroom and non-school situations. Since this conclusion is based on studies which used observations of students in school and non-school settings, and included questionnaires answered by students and parents, this conclusion seems reasonably valid. In addition, Johnson and Johnson (1996) found, based on previous studies, that peer mediation almost always produces a workable and stable agreement, though the agreement can be quite simple in nature. For instance, it can consist of the promise "to be friendly" or the agreement to "avoid each other". Johnson and Johnson (1996) conclude in their review that students are able to mediate successfully their schoolmates' conflicts, regardless of age level or socioeconomic status. Also, after mediation training, according to surveys among students, students' attitudes toward conflict and the school climate tend to be more positive and students' psychological health and self-esteem increases. Interviews with teachers, administrators and students showed that discipline problems and suspensions decreased (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Furthermore, mediation supports the learning of skills for problem-solving, decision-making, communication, critical thinking, and self-discipline (Bickmore, 2002; Clark, 1994). It also supports the empowerment of students, because peer mediation emphasizes responsibility and social interest (Bickmore, 2001; Clark, 1994).

Though there are many benefits, designing and implementing peer mediation programs does not necessarily lead to these positive effects. The selection of mediators, for instance, can affect the effectiveness of the mediation processes. According to Bickmore (2001, 2002) strong peer mediators are not necessarily 'good students', as perceived by the school staff. She states that peer mediators must be influential among their peers because a mediator has to persuade disputants to reach a constructive solution. A peer mediator also



must have leadership capabilities in order to lead the negotiation process (Bickmore, 2002). Furthermore, a team of mediators has to be representative for the entire school. Teams of peer mediators that include students of diverse academic abilities, genders, and cultural groups are stronger, more sustainable, and more effective than homogeneous teams (Day-Vines, 1996, as cited in Bickmore, 2002).

According to Clark (1994), it is important to provide a continuing support system for mediators in which they systematically learn to implement their skills. The initial training should consist of 15 to 20 hours. The following training sessions should focus on further development and not on the rehearsal of the same skills (Clark, 1994) in order to enhance the motivation of the mediators. Johnson and Johnson (1996) agree with the importance of follow-up lessons and state that a few hours of mediation training will not result in successful mediators. They perceive successful mediation training to be a spiral curriculum in which students are given 12 years of training, with the training becoming more complex and sophisticated every year. The emphasis that Johnson and Johnson (1996) and Clark (1994) put on continuing training sessions point to the idea that mediation is not an easy process, but requires well-founded training and continuing support.

A common difference between mediation training programs is the amount of students who are trained to be mediators. Sometimes a program only trains a group of students who become a mediation team. This is called the 'cadre approach' (Bickmore, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Other programs teach all the students in the class or school, so that every student learns the mediation skills. This is known as the 'total student approach' (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). The cadre approach is frequently used in mediation programs because it can meet the objectives of conflict resolution education at low cost and with minimal organizational change (Bickmore, 2001). Teaching all the students, on the other hand, will emphasize a school-wide discipline program in which all the students can benefit from the positive effects of mediation training (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Stevahn, 2004). Considering the many possible positive effect, also on a personal level, it seems fair to give all students the change to benefit from conflict resolution education.

### *Controversy*

David Johnson and Roger Johnson support the use of controversy in the classroom, which is another means to implement conflict resolution in schools. Controversy, as stated earlier, exists when one person's ideas, information, conclusions, theories, or opinions are incompatible with those of another person, and both seek to reach an agreement (Johnson & Johnson, 1979). The controversy process entails five steps: (1) students prepare positions on an academic issue by organizing relevant information and deriving conclusions; (2) students present and advocate these positions and other students, in turn, advocate opposing positions;

(3) students engage in an open discussion by continuing to advocate their own positions, attempting to refute the opposing positions, and rebutting others' attacks; (4) students reverse perspectives and present the opposing position as persuasively and completely as possible, and (5) students create a synthesis based on a reconceptualization that integrates both perspectives (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Johnson, Johnson & Smith, 1996).

The effectiveness of controversy, according to Johnson and Johnson (1979), is based on the mix of social interdependence and cognitive or conceptual conflict. Social interdependence is created by the need of two parties, who have different perspectives on the same subject, to create a synthesis with each other. Controversy creates conceptual conflict through the use of contrasting ideas or perspectives. These contrasting ideas can stimulate learning, as explained in the paragraph 'The positive effects of conflict'. They stimulate curiosity and motivation to resolve the conflict by seeking new information and by trying to reorganize the current knowledge base. This idea is supported by a meta-analysis of Johnson and Johnson who found that controversy produced higher achievement and retention of the material and skills being learned than did debate, individualistic learning or concurrence seeking (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). However, what kind of material or skills were learned does not become clear. They also found that controversy promotes greater liking, social support, and self-esteem among participants than did debate, concurrence seeking, the absence of controversy, or individualistic efforts (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Controversy also supports reversing perspectives, which is a common element in conflict resolution. Changing roles during the controversy promotes greater understanding of another person's cognitive perspective. Furthermore, the goal of controversy is to arrive at a high quality solution which synthesizes both perspectives. In the final step of the controversy process students therefore practice cooperative problem-solving skills in which the conflict between perspectives is seen as a problem to be solved. Finally, controversy can stimulate creativity through the use of interpersonal interaction which increases the number of ideas, quality of ideas, feelings of stimulation and enjoyment, and originality of expression in creative problem-solving (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). In sum, controversy stimulates academic achievement through conceptual conflict, supports creativity through engaging interpersonal interaction, and stimulates central elements of conflict resolution such as changing perspective and problem-solving skills.

Controversy, however, does not necessarily lead to these positive consequences. There are several preconditions to consider. Effective and constructive controversy demands a cooperative context in which a joint synthesis can be reached; heterogeneity among student to ensure diverse conclusions from information and experiences (which is the basis of controversy); access to relevant information necessary to arrive at the solution of the learning task; sufficient perspective-taking and communication skills by students to effectively

exchange information and insights; and students must be able to disagree with one another's ideas while confirming each other's personal competence (Johnson & Johnson, 1979).

Controversy is a good example of the integration of conflict resolution skills into the formal current curriculum. It can be executed in diverse academic subjects without considerable curricular adjustments. It also gives students experience in constructively resolving interpersonal conflicts (by cooperatively creating a synthesis between different ideas) and intrapersonal conflicts (by handling cognitive conflict).

### *Conflict resolution training*

Effective negotiation, mediation or controversy is not possible without students knowing what conflict is. Conceptual understanding of negotiation and mediation is essential for the constructive execution of these procedures (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). The actual content of conflict resolution training can be very diverse, though Morton Deutsch (1993) has assembled thirteen different content elements which are included in many training programs: (1) the occurrence of different types of conflict; (2) causes and consequences of violence and the alternatives to violence; (3) to face conflict rather than avoid it; (4) to respect yourself and your interests, and to respect the other and his interests; (5) to understand and accept cultural differences; (6) to distinguish between interests and positions: positions may be opposed, but interests may not be; (7) to explore your interests and the other's interests to identify common and compatible interests; (8) to define conflicting interests as a mutual problem to be solved; (9) to effectively communicate: active listening and clear communication of thoughts and feelings; (10) to be aware of bias, misperceptions, misjudgments, and stereotyped thinking during heated conflict; (11) to develop skills for dealing with difficult conflicts: be firm, fair and friendly; (12) to know yourself and how you typically respond in different conflict situations; and (13) to remain a moral person during conflict (Deutsch, 1993). These elements can be used as the basic principles of a conflict resolution training program.

The ability to change perspectives is a central element in conflict resolution. To illustrate, an important part of the negotiation, mediation, and the controversy procedure is to reverse perspectives. The ability to view a situation from both perspectives fosters understanding in the interests and positions of the other party. It is therefore recommendable to include practice in changing perspectives in the conflict resolution training. One way to change perspectives is through role reversal. Role reversal can create a clearer understanding of the opponent's and one's own positions, create understanding in the opponent's frame of reference, and can reduce threat and defensiveness (Johnson, 1967). Clarification of misunderstandings and similarities between conflict parties through role reversal can lead to the resolution of the conflict (Johnson, 1967). Therefore, one way of including the ability to reverse perspectives in conflict training is through the use of role reversal and role play

(McFarland, 1992; Stevahn, 2004). Students then learn to view an issue from multiple perspectives, which will enhance their conflict resolution skills.

Problem solving also seems to be a central element of constructive conflict resolution. Conflict resolution is often compared to cooperative problem solving because a constructive process of conflict resolution seems similar to an effective, cooperative problem solving process in which the conflict is perceived as the mutual problem to be solved (Deutsch, 1993). Problem solving, just like constructive conflict resolution, implies the development of a solution which provides acceptable gain to both parties (Filley, 1975). Some even perceive cooperative problem solving to be a necessity for disputing parties to arrive at a mutually satisfactory conclusion (Davidson & Wood, 2004). Hocker and Wilmot (1995) and Johnson and Johnson (2004) emphasize the problem-solving phase in negotiation in which proposals are exchanged between the parties. They state that conflicting parties in a negotiation process depend on their ability to search for acceptable proposals so resolution can be achieved. This is probably why integrative negotiation is also known as integrative problem-solving negotiation (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). It therefore seems inevitable to include problem solving in conflict resolution education.

### **Preconditions of conflict resolution education**

Though there are several ways to implement conflict resolution education in an effective manner, there are also preconditions on the overall school level. The most important preconditions to support the effectiveness of conflict resolution education are discussed below.

#### *Applying conflict resolution according to a long term approach*

Many researchers and authorities state that conflict resolution needs to be a long term project for learners to effectively learn constructive conflict resolution (Deutsch, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 2004; UNESCO, 1995; Walraven, 2003). One workshop or lesson or even a series of lessons is not sufficient to create sustaining effects (Walraven, 2003). Learners need repeated opportunities to practice the procedures and skills in order to overlearn the required negotiation and mediation procedures. Overlearning will create automatic habit patterns which, as stated earlier, are crucial when the person is confronted with a conflict.

In their research on conflict resolution skills and cultural learning, Eisikovits and Kernieli (1992) found that a traditional introductory course is not suitable for learners to increase their ability to deal with conflict. The course consisted of fourteen two-hour weekly whole-class meetings with over 80 students. Eisikovits and Kernieli (ibid) state that, with no

tutorial sessions allowing for small group discussions, there was no possibility of a more thorough processing of the material. They state that in this course students were provided with just a glimpse of alternative inter-group relations. The results were not sufficient for creating significant cultural inter-group understanding. Moreover, it is remarkable that a course on culture fair inter-group relations, only focuses on knowledge, and not on learning and practicing conflict resolution skills (such as reversing perspectives and problem solving) or skills related to conflict resolution (such as social competence and effective communication). It is likely that these skills will also have positive effects on the relation between different cultural groups.

Johnson and Johnson (2004) state that constructive conflict resolution is best learned through distributed training sessions extending over years. They also state that problem-solving negotiations and mediation skills can already be taught in kindergarten (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). The Teaching Students to be Peacemakers-program (TSP) is an example of a long-term perspective on conflict resolution in which students learn negotiation and mediation skills. The TSP program is a 12-year spiral curriculum in which students receive training every year from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Every year the training becomes more complex (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). The exact content of the TSP program is not explained, though. It is therefore not possible to check whether the TSP program also adjusts its content to the current reasoning structure of the student, or to the current level of ego-development. It seems beneficial to closely examine the developmental aspects of students when designing long-term conflict resolution programs and to adjust the programs to the current level of the student.

#### *Applying different forms of conflict resolution simultaneously*

Another precondition for effective conflict resolution is to create multiple learning opportunities in different forms to learn about and to practice constructive conflict resolution. For that reason, a broad approach in conflict resolution education is often recommended (Bickmore, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Nation, 2003; Walraven, 2003), although most education programs focus on peer mediation instead of a more comprehensive approach (ECCP, 2003). Bickmore (1997) suggests that students can practice conflict management not only by peer mediation in hallways and schoolyards, but also in the context of meaningful problems presented throughout the academic curriculum. These meaningful problems are often conflicts from real life, such as social and historical conflicts, which are discussed in the classroom. In this way, not only do learners practice with complex conflict situations, they also practice considering problems from multiple viewpoints. This closely resembles controversy, discussed earlier, which also supports the training of conflict resolution skills. The use of discussion and controversy in combination with explicit conflict resolution

training and peer mediation has two benefits. First, it increases the number of opportunities to practice conflict resolution skills. Second, controversy and discussion are easy to implement in the current curriculum (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Stevahn, 2004). Almost any subject includes some kind of conflict; this can be a real conflict (e.g. political conflicts and war in history) or conceptual conflicts (e.g. evolution theory and genesis in biology, or social conflict in social studies). Teachers can examine their current curriculum for the presence of conflict and can address these conflicts with students through controversy and discussion in order to practice conflict resolution skills. This is also a low-cost method because it does not require the purchase of new student materials or instructional resources; nor does it require the development of new courses or units of study (Stevahn, 2004).

Johnson and Johnson (1994) emphasize the combination of cooperative learning, controversy, and peer mediation in schools. Although they have not tested their hypothesis, they think it is likely that these three procedures enhance each other's effectiveness. Cooperative learning supports controversy and peer mediation by establishing a context in which students constructively work together to resolve conflict. Controversy is a form of cooperative learning and teaches procedures, skills, attitudes, and values directly transferable to the peer mediation program. It also makes conflict enjoyable and constructive for students. So theoretically, these three procedures supplement and support each other in conflict resolution education.

Tim Nation (2003) mentions a comprehensive conflict resolution program which consists of four components: peer mediation, peace clubs, random acts of kindness, and conflict resolution curriculum. Peace clubs focus on service learning projects that create a peaceful school community, such as creating gardens and forming partnerships with a local nursing home. Random acts of kindness are good deeds done by students. Conflict resolution curriculum consists of classroom time spent on teaching conflict management skills, such as reflective listening and rephrasing. Nation emphasizes this broad approach by stating that peer mediation should at least be supplemented with conflict management curriculum in order for all students and staff to learn the same skills (Nation, 2003). This conclusion is logical given the fact that in this case peer mediation was implemented according to the cadre approach in which only a select group of students learns to mediate conflicts. In this scenario, multiple learning opportunities are even more important for all students to acquire conflict resolution skills.

#### *Application in formal and informal curriculum*

The simultaneous application of conflict resolution in different forms also entails the use of conflict resolution in the formal and informal curriculum. This enhances the effectiveness of conflict resolution considerably (ECCP, 2003). If students need to have continuing

experiences with constructive conflict resolution, then these experiences should not be limited to the classroom alone. In addition to training sessions and the integration of conflict resolution in different subjects, the school environment needs to support constructive conflict resolution. The daily experience of cooperative relations and of constructive resolution of conflicts between members of the school gives students the possibility to model this behaviour (Deutsch, 1993). Robert Coles (1997) in his theory on moral intelligence emphasizes the importance of modeling. Modeling is more effective in teaching children what to do than simply telling them. Accordingly, the behaviour of school teachers and staff are very important for a broad and consistent approach to conflict resolution.

Hutchinson (1996) calls this the compatibility between means and ends in the formal and informal curriculum. “It is a contradiction in terms, for example, to proclaim a peaceful end but to attempt to reach this end by culturally violent means in the classroom. To educate for a peaceful future implies doing it in peaceful, friendly and dialogical ways, not authoritarian, unfriendly and monological ways” (Hutchinson, 1996, p. 206). If the means of school educators are not compatible with the ends of constructive conflict resolution, it is likely that children will model behaviour which does not support the goals of the conflict resolution program.

In the example of the TSP-program discussed earlier, the objectives of the program also emphasize a classroom and school climate which is conducive to resolving conflicts constructively. Furthermore, the TSP considers the formal and the informal curriculum by not only focusing on the students, but also on the faculty staff by ensuring that both groups have positive attitudes toward conflict and that both groups practice the negotiation and mediation procedures (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). This ensures compatibility between the means and ends of the conflict resolution program and creates opportunities for modeling behaviour.

Townley (1995) goes even further by not only implementing conflict resolution in the school, but also in the surrounding community. According to him, peer mediation is more likely to succeed if the whole school community understands the principles being taught in the schools. Hence, conflict resolution programs must be comprehensive, involving students, teachers, families as well as the community (Townley, 1995). It is likely that some parents and other members of the community are willing to be involved in this approach to conflict resolution. Previous research has shown that conflict resolution programs at school evoke positive and curious reactions from parents and that they often request training on this subject themselves to be able to resolve conflicts constructively in their own homes (Johnson & Johnson, 1994; 2004). This approach, to include parents and other members of the community, can create extra learning opportunities for students to develop attitudes and skills on conflict resolution through the use of diverse and complex conflict situations outside of the school.

*Application in a cooperative context*

An important part of the informal curriculum is the context in which the program takes place. The context of conflict largely determines whether constructive or destructive outcomes occur (Deutsch, 1973; Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Stevahn, 2004). Therefore, the context of the conflict resolution program is highly important because the social context can influence the conflict resolution process and consequently affect the effectiveness of the training. There are roughly two possible school contexts: a competitive and a cooperative context. A cooperative context exists when people perceive that they can obtain their goal if and only if the other people with whom they are linked also can obtain their goals. Hence, in a cooperative situation, individuals work together to achieve their goals. In a competitive context people perceive that they can obtain their goals if and only if the other people with whom they are linked fail to obtain their goal (Johnson & Johnson, 1979; 1996).

The strength of cooperation lies in the fact that in a cooperative situation the disputing parties focus their energy on defeating the problem instead of each other because they perceive the conflict as a mutual problem (Filley, 1975). This is in line with the definition of constructive conflict resolution in which the parties seek to create a win-win solution. A constructive resolution is then likely to occur. Some even perceive a cooperative context as a necessary element for conflicts to be resolved constructively (Deutsch, 1973).

A cooperative context has effects in the following areas: (1) the communication of relevant information in a cooperative situation tends to be open and honest, (2) perceptions of the other person and the other person's actions tend to be accurate and constructive, (3) the relationship is characterized by trust and responsiveness, and (4) individuals recognize the legitimacy of each other's interests and search for a solution accommodating the needs of both sides (Deutsch, 1973; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Open communication, trusting relationships, mutual respect, and commitment to find a beneficial solution for both parties all are essential aspects in achieving a constructive conflict resolution process (Clark, 1994; Davidson & Wood, 2004; Stevahn, 2004). Not surprisingly, a cooperative context, compared to a competitive environment, produces the best results for conflict resolution education, mainly because cooperative classrooms and schools teach students to seek solutions to problems rather than to "win" (Hutchinson, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Furthermore, a cooperative learning environment can stimulate the prevention of unnecessary conflict since cooperative learning groups tend to encourage racial toleration, higher levels of self-esteem and improved social living skills (Hutchinson, 1996).

The importance of a cooperative context for conflict resolution relates to the theory of Hutchinson: to create effective conflict resolution education, the means should be compatible with the ends (Hutchinson, 1996). Or as Johnson & Johnson (1994) state: "It makes little sense to attempt to teach students to manage conflicts constructively if the school is structured



so that students are pitted against each other in competition for scarce rewards and students have to defeat each other to get what they want” (Johnson & Johnson, 1994, p. 118). In other words, the context is a means which should be compatible with the ends of conflict resolution education. Cooperation fits with these ends.

In sum, a cooperative context seems to be a necessity in creating effective conflict resolution education. The easiest and most logical way to create a cooperative context is by structuring the majority of the learning situations cooperatively. Cooperative learning is considered to have great academic benefits. In comparison with individualistic learning, cooperative learning tends to promote greater effort to achieve, more positive relationships among students and greater psychological adjustments, to name a few of the known advantages (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Creating a substantial amount of cooperative learning situations in schools is therefore in itself a valid argument, and even more when it supports constructive conflict resolution. In the TSP program, for example, two strategies are used to create supportive relationships: cooperative pair interview, in which groups of two students take turns interviewing each other on curriculum based questions; and cooperative mind mapping, in which students, after considering a body of information, pool their recollection and comprehension of the material to create a list of key characters, events, facts, and details (Stevahn, 2004). However, the effects of these strategies on constructive conflict resolution are not known.

Although cooperative learning has many benefits and is an understandable concept, establishing a cooperative context is not that simple. Teachers who are not familiar with cooperative learning need to learn new skills and methods, such as structuring cooperative learning goals, monitor and intervene in student work groups, and apply ways of integrating cooperative learning with competitive and individualistic learning activities (Deutsch, 1993). Also, students themselves need to be trained in cooperation. According to Clark (1994), everyone is capable of cooperation, but it needs to be stimulated and trained, especially when students are not used to solving problems cooperatively.

## **Discussion**

The main question of this research was: *What are, according to scientific theory, the guidelines and preconditions for designing conflict resolution education?* There are different forms of conflict resolution education which can be used for designing conflict resolution education at schools. These are negotiation, mediation, controversy and cognitive conflict, and general conflict resolution training. Important skills for constructive conflict resolution

are the ability to change perspectives and problem-solving. These elements should be a part of conflict resolution education in order for students to effectively solve conflicts.

The benefits of conflict through the use of controversy and meaningful problems are remarkable. Research points out that these types of conflict can stimulate the skills necessary to constructively resolve interpersonal conflict. This may be an advantage for educators, because controversy and meaningful problems are relatively easy to implement at low costs. Also, in a time where educators are pushed to increase academic achievement in an already overcrowded curriculum, the use of curriculum-integrated conflicts can help to address conflict resolution *and* increase academic achievement without heavily increasing the work load for students and teachers (Stevahn, 2004). The effects of this types of conflict are therefore very promising for the development of conflict resolution in schools.

Research shows that there are several preconditions for effective conflict resolution education. To acquire effective negotiation skills, for example, it is important that students get opportunities to practice these skills until they become automatic habit patterns. In peer mediation, the importance of well-founded training and support are stressed. Controversy demands a cooperative context as well as communication and social skills already acquired by students. These types of conflict resolution, therefore, do not automatically lead to success. In designing conflict resolution education, these preconditions should be considered.

There are also preconditions for conflict resolution education on the overall school level. Conflict resolution is clearly not something that can be taught in a few lessons. Conflict resolution demands a long-term approach and has to be simultaneously applied in different forms to be truly effective. A curriculum that is spread over several years and diversity in the execution of conflict resolution provide students with multiple learning opportunities which are necessary to acquire constructive conflict resolution skills. Furthermore, the informal curriculum and the context in which conflict resolution education takes place have a major influence on the effectiveness of the program. It is important that the processes that surround the curriculum do not contradict with the goals of conflict resolution education. Teachers and school staff should therefore also display constructive conflict resolution skills in their interactions with students and with colleagues. This gives students the opportunity to model their behaviour. In a similar vein, cooperation has to be a central element in the classroom because constructive conflict resolution closely resembles the process of cooperative problem-solving. A competitive teaching context would contradict with the goal of conflict resolution education. These overall preconditions imply the necessity of a broad approach of conflict resolution which does not only focus on the length and content of the conflict resolution program, but also on the informal curriculum and context in which the program takes place.

The positive effects of conflict resolution programs are emphasized in a large number of scientific publications. However, it is often not clear how the effectiveness of these programs is measured. The criteria on which the effectiveness is measured are often not clearly described or not mentioned at all. This poses questions to the actual effects of conflict resolution programs, because the definitions of 'conflict' and 'effective resolution' can differ greatly between different studies.

It should also be noted that none of the sources in this review answered the question whether conflict resolution education can be applied to all type of students. Is conflict resolution education effective on all school levels? Should the content of the conflict resolution program differ based on the level of the students? The results of Bickmore (2002) and Day-Vines (1996, as cited in Bickmore, 2002) seem to imply that peer mediation is effective on all school levels, because the effectiveness of a peer mediator does not depend on his or her academic achievement. However, more conclusive results are necessary to support this claim. It is also not clear if conflict resolution education is also effective for students whom are prone to violence, or whom are difficult to educate. It is possible that different students require different methods or content of conflict resolution education. These subjects therefore require further research.

Moreover, many studies do not explicitly mention a difference in effectiveness of conflict resolution education between male and female students. It seems possible that gender differences can affect the effectiveness of conflict resolution education. For example, men are often perceived to be more prone to aggression and violence than women. This is a topic which should be clarified in order to adapt the content of conflict resolution education to possible gender differences.

Furthermore, it is remarkable that research on conflict resolution education often does not mention a link with bullying in schools. Bullying, as stated in the introduction of this review, is a type of conflict which is not resolved through the use of conflict resolution methods alone. But although bullying is a different type of conflict, it seems that the effects of conflict resolution education can have a positive influence on the prevention of bullying. Effects such as the reduction of aggression, improvement of communication and social skills, increased self-esteem and a positive school climate can be beneficial to prevent bullying. Skills such as cooperative problem-solving and reversing perspectives can promote understanding and cooperation between students. Selekman and Vessy (2004) do state that conflict resolution education applied in the formal and informal curriculum can prevent bullying. According to them, teaching students to reverse roles and to use effective communication can be helpful. However, they do question the use of peer mediation in conflicts that involve bullying, because this can cause too much stress for the victim (Selekman & Vessy, 2004). This is in line with the structural character of bullying in which

one party is often perceived to be more dominant than the other. Mediation is based on resolving conflict between equal parties, which therefore does not seem to be the most effective means to resolve bullying.

Finally, only a limited number of studies focus on the influence of media on our perceptions of effective conflict resolution. The large amount of violence in electronic media reflects an image of a society in which violence occurs naturally (Vriens, 2006). It also portrays an image in which violence, in a lot of cases, is a legitimate and even a heroic approach to solve a conflict. It is likely that these images will affect the perception of students on how to constructively solve conflicts (Hutchinson, 1996). Considering the modeling behaviour of students on people in their surroundings, it seems plausible that students will also model behaviour from (role) models in electronic media. Although electronic media cannot be altered by schools, conflict resolution education can certainly stimulate students to not be passive consumers of media and to create awareness of its effects and limited scope on conflict.

There are several limitations of the research method used in this review study. Only three resources were used to retrieve the necessary scientific publications: the catalogue for books and print publications, the database for electronic publications at the Utrecht University library, and the Dutch catalogue Picarta. It is possible that by using other resources more or additional information could be retrieved. Also, not all relevant publications which were found in the search process could be read and analyzed in the limited amount of time available for this review. There is more information available than is addressed in this article. Furthermore, the research method of this review depends to a large extent on personal judgment: determining which authors and publications are mentioned most frequently is based on a personal estimation. The number of citations on Google scholar is also an estimation of the impact of a certain author or publication. Also, if a publication was not cited in a large number of other publications, but its content was nevertheless deemed vital for this review, the publication was still read and analyzed.

## **Conclusion**

Conflict resolution education can be applied in various forms: through negotiation, mediation, controversy, and general training. Forms of conflict resolution such as peer mediation and controversy are relatively easy for schools to design and implement into their current curricula. Reversing perspectives and problem-solving should be vital elements of any conflict resolution program. However, designing effective conflict resolution education requires a broad approach which entails a long-term process, multiple forms of conflict

resolution applied simultaneously, and an informal curriculum and context which do not contradict with conflict resolution, are necessary.

Conflicts occur throughout a lifetime, in different situations and on different levels. Conflict is especially a considerable part of the lives of today's youth. It is therefore important to teach students constructive conflict resolution so they can solve conflicts in a positive and beneficial way.

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