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The SCRAM Program for Conflict Resolution Education in Western Australian Secondary Schools

Archie Zariski
School of Law, Murdoch University

Irene Styles
School of Education, Murdoch University

“The research consistently demonstrates that conflict resolution education has significant positive benefits for children. It increases academic achievement, positive attitude toward school, assertiveness, self-control, cooperation, communication skills, healthy interpersonal and intergroup relations, and constructive conflict resolution at home and school. It decreases aggressiveness, discipline referrals, the dropout rate, and social withdrawal. There are also strong benefits for schools in terms of developing a positive classroom and school climate.”

“As a field, we often comment that awareness of mediation and facilitation is still too low, that we must work diligently to educate the public about what we have to offer. Perhaps our greatest marketing tool is conflict resolution education. We can and should work to promote a more conflict-educated society so that, as adults, these children will be better informed about and already convinced of the benefits of alternative dispute resolution.”

Tricia S Jones, “Attending to Our Future: Why We Should Support Conflict Resolution Education”, *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, Vol 19, No 4, Summer 2002

Introduction

It is always nice to be told that what is in our self interest also benefits others. This is the message the editor of the *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* has for the mediation community. Helping schools teach conflict resolution concepts and skills to young people can lead to a more peaceable society that values the process of mediation and those skilled in it.

Other articles in the same issue of the *Quarterly* describe how partnerships between dispute resolution practitioners and educators have succeeded in the United States. This paper investigates how such collaboration has, and, increasingly, could take place in Australia by focussing on a current program involving law mediation practitioners and several secondary schools in Western Australia. We will first describe the current opportunities for conflict resolution education and then outline a specific strategy that has been implemented in these schools, the impact of this strategy on schools and students, and whether it could be adopted further to take advantage of any positive effects it might have.

Three approaches to conflict resolution education can be discerned: curricular, developmental and remedial. Each is particularly associated with a distinct group in the educational system.

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First, teachers are primarily interested in content - the subject matter which develops students' cognitive abilities - and the ways in which that content may be addressed by teachers and learners. For these educators, conflict and resolution processes may be themes and topics of inquiry and debate within the curriculum.

Second, educational staff employed in student services and as school psychologists have a somewhat different focus. School psychologists may be attracted by conflict resolution programs for their ability to help deal with disruptive behaviour, but may also view them as supporting student development of social and interpersonal skills. Constructive management of conflict can be viewed from this perspective as a sign of good mental health and social adjustment.

Finally, administrators may be most concerned with classroom and behaviour management issues in connection with conflict resolution. For administrators, programs that can lessen the severity and incidence of destructive conflict in schools such as bullying and harassment (particularly that resulting in violence) are valuable management tools. Administrators may be attracted to conflict resolution programs as remedial measures to improve student behaviour and school climate.

We do not suggest that teachers, psychologists and administrators have no interest in benefits of conflict resolution education other than those that meet their most pressing needs. However, these unique perspectives on this form of education seem to be significant in Western Australia and provide a framework for considering the specific program of interest in this paper. It is argued that to have maximum impact, conflict resolution education should be relevant to all three educational domains, and that the particular program used in this study can be used to achieve this aim.

Conflict Resolution Education in the Curriculum

Each primary and secondary school in WA has a good deal of freedom and flexibility in deciding what and how it teaches. Individual teachers can choose their own subject matter and teaching activities under the supervision of school administrations. The Curriculum Framework for Western Australian Schools (<http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/pages/framework/framework00.htm>) provides the guidelines within which these choices are made.

The Framework and its associated Student Outcome Statements is not a syllabus listing subject areas and required "content". Instead, it is based on broad but well defined "learning outcomes" which include both "product" and "process" outcomes, and a developmental approach to attaining them. These outcomes are to be aimed for across eight "learning areas": The Arts, English, Health and Physical Education, Languages Other Than English, Mathematics, Science, Society and Environment and Technology and Enterprise.

The WA Curriculum Framework creates many opportunities to integrate conflict resolution education into schools' teaching and learning activities, but few of them are being exploited. The mediation community has the opportunity, together with educators in schools, to help bring the benefits of conflict resolution education to young people and their communities. Such a collaboration has been implemented in Western Australia jointly between members of

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the mediation community and a range of interested schools through the initiative of a Schools Conflict Resolution and Mediation Program (SCRAM) which is described in a later section.

Core Values

To its credit the Curriculum Framework of Western Australia proclaims the importance of values in education and makes them central to all teaching and learning activities:

People's values influence their behaviour and give meaning and purpose to their lives. While there is a range of value positions in our pluralistic society, there is also a core of shared values. The Curriculum Framework is underpinned by these shared values, ...

One of the values is then summarised as being:

Sensitivity to and concern for the well-being of other people; and respect for life and property. Encouragement is given to each person to be caring and compassionate, to be respectful of the rights of others, and to find constructive ways of managing conflict. This includes the right to learn in a friendly and non-coercive environment.

Another value given prominence is reconciling difference:

The commitment to exploring and promoting the common good and meeting individual needs without infringing the basic rights of others. This includes the encouragement of each person to participate in democratic processes, to value diversity of cultural expression, to respect legitimate authority, to promote social justice and to support the use of research for the improvement of the quality of life.

Reconciliation: *Strategies of cooperation and reconciliation are preferred to coercion and confrontation, especially where groups or individuals are in conflict.*

Conflict resolution education including training in the principles and practices of mediation fits squarely within these values espoused within the framework.

Overarching Statement

The Curriculum Framework provides an overarching statement intended to guide teaching in all learning areas. This also emphasises a key skill that is fostered by conflict resolution education:

*Particular attention is given to the importance of maintaining a holistic view of curriculum, the responsibility of curriculum as a whole for such vital skills as literacy, numeracy and **social cooperation**, and the need to integrate knowledge, skills and values across all learning areas.*

More specific learning outcomes are also provided in this Statement. Two of these that are particularly relevant are:

12. Students are self-motivated and confident in their approach to learning and are able to work individually and collaboratively.

Students plan, reflect on and direct their own learning. When needed, they seek help from adults, peers, print resources and technology. They have available a range of strategies to help them get started, work through, persist with and learn from problems independently. They also recognise when collaboration will enhance their work. They work well with others and contribute in various ways, sometimes leading and sometimes following, accepting, sharing, integrating or adapting ideas from others and building on various positions flexibly and responsively: for example, students may prepare their own work plan for completing a project; cooperate in small groups to make a construction from blocks; conduct a class meeting; play in a team; undertake cycles of problem posing, conjecture and justification to investigate a mathematical situation; help produce a newsletter or play; negotiate with potential “clients” regarding a design; work with community members on a local issue; or use the Internet to work collaboratively on a project with students in another school.

13. Students recognise that everyone has the right to feel valued and be safe, and, in this regard, understand their rights and obligations and behave responsibly. *Students respect the rights of others to equal access to resources and to a work and leisure environment which is non-threatening and free from harassment such as teasing, sarcasm or remarks that stereotype or denigrate others or their efforts. They understand the rights and responsibilities associated with living in a democratic society. They cooperate with their peers and try to understand those whose backgrounds, experiences or values differ from their own. They show by their actions that they recognise and appreciate differences between people. They are aware of the impact of their behaviour on others, take responsibility for their own actions, and reflect on the effects of their actions in order to learn from their experiences. They recognise a collective obligation to assist others to be respected and safe and accept that they must take some personal responsibility for their own emotional and physical safety. Students are aware of and understand the need for policies and laws which provide redress for, and sanctions against, certain forms of unacceptable behaviour: for example, students may show concern for the welfare of other students; explain the reasons for a classroom rule; share limited resources; welcome new students to the school; work cooperatively with a wide range of other students; or show respect for the feelings of others.*

It is noteworthy that no examples are given of students engaging in conflict resolution or mediation activities, although these would clearly help to achieve the desired outcomes. This absence should be seen as an opportunity for supporters of conflict resolution education to demonstrate how it can help schools achieve these outcomes equally as well as, or perhaps better than through other student activities.

Phases of Development

Because it is based on a developmental approach the Curriculum Student Outcome Statements also describe appropriate learning activities for various ages. Social and interpersonal skills are key features of recommended activities for all ages – activities that may be taught as part of conflict resolution education:

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (typically years 3 to 7)

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Students' abilities to work collaboratively and to develop their social skills should be fostered by activities which require group planning and decision making, and interaction with people inside and outside their classroom. They should be given increased responsibility for managing and organising activities, individually and in groups of varying sizes.

EARLY ADOLESCENCE (typically years 7 to 10)

Students' growing independence and peer-group orientation is built upon by providing opportunities for them to participate in important forms of decision making within the classroom and school and to work with others. Through such experiences students assume increased responsibilities, develop decision making skills, explore values and further refine their social and collaborative work skills.

LATE ADOLESCENCE/EARLY ADULTHOOD (typically years 10 to 12)

In this phase, students have a stronger sense of their own strengths, interests and goals. They play a major role in determining the decisions that affect their lives and in shaping their learning experiences. They have a developing sense of themselves as active players who have some responsibility for the direction of community life, and are often concerned about major social and environmental issues and the ethical implications of human activity and knowledge.

Conflict resolution education is also consistent with the statement of key learning and teaching objectives provided by the Curriculum Framework. The Framework requires that learning experiences be authentic and salient:

Learning experiences should enable students to observe and practise the actual processes, products, skills and values which are expected of them.

Students should have the opportunity to engage as fully as possible in the processes they are expected to learn about or through, rather than only components or analogues for them...If they are to be expected to learn to plan, investigate and make choices, then they must practise these skills, rather than simply carrying out the plans, investigations and choices of others.

Training in conflict resolution principles and skills that encourages students to engage in negotiations and mediations clearly fulfils this objective.

Learning experiences should encourage students to learn both independently and from and with others.

If students are to become autonomous learners, they need to regularly experience opportunities for both individual and collaborative learning. Working individually is necessary and can help to ensure a personal grasp of concepts, processes and skills. Working with peers enables students to be challenged by the views of others, clarify ideas and interpret and use appropriate language. Often discussion will involve

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students in explaining ideas to others and, in doing so, clarifying these ideas for themselves.

Teamwork and reconciling differences of opinion and belief is taught through conflict resolution education programs and thus meets this objective also.

The school and classroom setting should be safe and conducive to effective learning.

Furthermore, the school and classroom should provide a cooperative atmosphere, free from harassment such as teasing, sarcasm or remarks that stereotype or denigrate students or their efforts. Difference and diversity should be respected and sensitivity shown to matters of gender, cultural difference, social class, ability and disability, family circumstance and individual difference.

Conflict resolution education can be the means through which students can learn to manage and avoid conflicts caused by bias, insensitivity and discrimination.

Links Across the Curriculum

The Curriculum Framework emphasises that the desired learning outcomes should be strived for across all the learning areas and should not be confined to particular subjects. It therefore gives examples of where outcomes can be linked across the curriculum. However, although linkages for cognitive outcomes have been described in some detail, those for values are sparsely described, despite the inherently interdisciplinary nature of values and, in particular, conflict resolution skills, knowledge and dispositions (Zariski, 2002).

Conflict Resolution Education in Personal Development

Peer mediation

Peer mediation programs usually aim at training a group of students for the purpose of intervention in school-related conflicts amongst their fellow students. In Western Australia these programs appear to occur mainly in the primary schools (for example, Bellevue, Guildford, and others (<http://www.guildfordps.wa.edu.au/Managing%20Student%20Behaviour%20Policy.htm>)), although some secondary schools (for example Perth Modern, Thornlie and Duncraig) have also adopted peer mediation programs.

Mediation training for selected students is often associated with activities designed to develop all students' social adaptation and interpersonal skills. For instance, in some schools in the Perth Education District conflict resolution is taught in the health area to whole classes and peer mediators are volunteers chosen from those groups. Peer mediation programs thus can be seen as spanning the developmental and remedial approaches because they can be used as a tool for classroom and behaviour management in wider contexts.

Conflict resolution skills

Some schools teach conflict resolution skills on a class wide basis in order to assist students in their personal development. This approach may or may not be associated with a peer

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mediation program (for example, Geraldton (Bluff Point) Camp School (<http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/centoff/schoolsanddistricts/camp/geraldton.html>) and schools in the Kwinana area).

An example of how conflict resolution education is embedded in developmental activities is the “Stop, Think, Do” program in Swan District primary schools. It is intended to help students learn problem solving and in doing so, also learn how to avoid destructive conflict with others.

Remedial Approaches to Conflict Resolution Education

Student services and psychologists

Among other activities, the Student Services section of the Western Australian Department of Education helps teachers and administrators with behaviour management for students. The Albany School District psychology service, for instance, indicates that it can provide specialised programs including “managing student behaviour, assertive discipline and conflict resolution skills” amongst others. (See: <http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/deo/Albany/Services/SS/psych.htm>)

Coosje Griffiths, a student services manager in the Swan Education District, advocates strategies across the school and curriculum for the prevention of bullying. She cites instruction in dispute resolution skills, practice in conflict resolution strategies and support systems such as peer mediation as linked responses to this problem. (See: http://www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth/symposium/ChildYouth/pdfs/Countering_bullying_in_schools.pdf)

SAER (<http://www.eddept.wa.edu.au/SAER/>)

“Students At Educational Risk” (SAER) is a program designed to prevent students from failing academically by reason of personal stress. It can address issues of school-related conflict where this inhibits students’ achievement.

One of the major desired outcomes of the SAER program is that “Staff and students will have the support to manage conflict without resorting to violence.”

We argue here that the Schools Conflict Resolution and Mediation (SCRAM) program which has been developed and implemented by local mediators in Western Australia over the past three years for students in years 8, 9 and 10, can provide another effective means of achieving the aims of all three approaches to, and purposes of conflict resolution education described above. We now describe this program and then present findings from evaluating its efficacy and impact over the three years since its inception.

The SCRAM program

On the initiative of local mediators, particularly in law, the first Schools Conflict Resolution and Mediation (SCRAM) program for secondary school students in years 8, 9 and 10 was implemented in Western Australia in 2001 (<http://online.murdoch.edu.au/public/SCRAM/index.html>). It was supported by The Sir

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Francis Burt Law Education Centre and the School of Law at Murdoch University and involved mediators from the disciplines of law and psychology. The two authors were involved in evaluating the impact of the program in its initial and subsequent years.

Its aims are to raise awareness of one major alternative dispute resolution approach and to develop the skills needed for this approach in school children at year 9/10 level.

This program attempts to make links with the curriculum although it can be implemented in a variety of ways.

The program takes the form of a series of, usually, four mediation role-playing sessions using a variety of specially-developed scenarios, in which students take on the roles of either mediators or injured parties. Two mediators, and two members constituting each 'injured party' participate in each session. All participants (including staff members who are involved in implementing the program and may not have background knowledge in the area) are coached in the concepts, purposes, procedures and skills of mediation by trained mediators.

In the first year, all role-playing sessions were adjudicated by another group of mediators, with participants receiving detailed feedback on their performances, however, in subsequent years, only the last two sessions were adjudicated – the penultimate one by assessing a video recording of the session, and the last as a public performance involving the two schools judged the best in skills displayed in the recorded sessions. All sessions except the last took place at each of the participating schools.

In the first, second and third years in which the program has run, 9, 10 and 9 schools, respectively, took part. In each year, about 12 schools were invited to participate, but some were unable to do so. They included both private and state, and both single sex and co-educational schools. Student participants (usually 6 to 10, but, in some cases, entire classes) were selected by the school staff in a variety of ways and coaching sessions organised also in different ways to suit the staff and students involved. These arrangements are detailed in the section on evaluation.

Evaluation

For the evaluation phase, in the first year schools differing in terms of public/private status, size and gender of students, were selected by the authors and invited to take part in interviews (in the case of the teaching staff) and focus groups (in the case of the students) held after the final mediation sessions and aimed at identifying what impacts, if any, the program had on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of participants and subsequent access to similar or related programs in the schools.

As a result, five groups of students from five schools participated in focus groups at each of their schools, and the teaching staff concerned with organising the program in each of the schools (invariably one or two per school) were interviewed individually or in pairs. In the second and third years, a self-report questionnaire was distributed to everyone attending the final mediation session. This included schools who were not participating in the actual session, as well as staff, parents, and other interested parties. In addition, in the third year, students and staff in three schools were interviewed.

Questionnaires and interviews all incorporated questions about knowledge of conflict resolution and the skills required, the aims and purposes of conflict resolution, the impact participants considered the program had on them and on others, the program's drawbacks and advantages, and its possible future use in schools. The findings related to these questions are presented in the next section.

Findings

Because findings were consistent over the three years of the program, they are reported as a whole. The opinions of students, teachers, coaches and adjudicators are presented in that order, then discussed according to their relevance to the introduction of conflict resolution education in schools.

In the first year, feedback from 24 students and six teachers was collected. In the second and third years, 18 and 14 completed questionnaires from 20 students, twelve teachers, twelve coaches and adjudicators, and twenty-one other people (parents, relatives and friends) were available, in addition to interview feedback from six students and two teachers. Table 1 in Appendix 1 presents the frequencies and percentages of "yes" responses to five questions about the SCRAM program collected in 2002 and 2003. Specific figures from this table are referred to in the text on each group of respondents. The views of parents are included in summary discussions.

Students' Feedback

Impact on self

Results from the 2002 and 2003 questionnaires indicated that 19 of the 20 student respondents (95%) considered they had *increased their knowledge of conflict resolution*. Interviews with students in the previous year showed they considered they had developed sound understandings of resolving conflict in ways which involve all parties with grievances in order to reach solutions both parties are satisfied with (or at least progressing towards such a solution).

These students considered the aim of conflict resolution to be to promote more positive relationships, which will mean less anger, and better future relationships. The use of mediation, or at least the full range of procedures and skills, would depend on the context. Their responses in regard to the purposes of SCRAM ranged from specific, surface reasons such as "teenage girls have a lot of conflicts" to deep understandings about learning skills and attitudes for the future – for use in workplaces and, in general, because recent generations have tended to be very egocentric, and this often leads to dealing with problems in an aggressive way, or not seeing others' view points.

They *think differently about conflict situations*. They find themselves thinking like a mediator – seeing the other person's point of view, hold back from giving advice. Most especially they find themselves LISTENING to other people carefully.

Eight out of the 20 2002/2003 participants maintained programs such as this would not help reduce conflict. This seemed to be because they thought conflict would always exist, but

conflict resolution skills could help find solutions. The question probably needs rewording. A few said the procedures could not be used in a playground situation – this was because they tended to see the use of conflict resolution as needing to involve the formal steps taught in this program. Other students said that in situations other than SCRAM, they do not use the formal steps of mediation model, but they *use and adapt the procedures* to make them less formal, but with same intent – they gave many examples of this both in school and home settings, some of which appear below:

“I have stopped thumping my brother”.

“(I) tried to use skills in mediating between friends who were arguing.”

“We do not use it in a strict sense, but it is there”.

“I try to work out where people are coming from”.

Generally you just use it in everyday life. It’s sort of locked into your brain”

“I used the mediation in a peer skills camp that I attended. They taught us the SCRAM approach and as we already knew it, it was a great help.”

Yes, at home with my brother. He took my SCRAM trophy!....without asking. Instead of screaming and hitting as we usually do, we worked it out quietly so he could look at it but he had to ask. And no smudgy fingerprints.”

My sister had borrowed my jacket and not returned it. At first I saw only my side of the story and I got angry before she could explain. I then realised that both parties needed to be allowed to express their opinion. I asked her to explain and we were able to resolve our conflict.”

“I have tried with a fight between friends but it didn’t go very successful. But they were able to reach agreement when I followed through the steps, not exactly, but mostly.”

“Yes, my uncle and dad were having this really overblown fight over a parking space and were being really stupid. I couldn’t interfere that much but I said that they weren’t looking at both sides of the situation and they made up an hour later. It was really funny.”

“In an argument, we sometimes joked about having a mediation to settle it! When a problem arose, we tried to see both points of view and that did help a bit.”

“Yes. In a fight at school where some friends were angry at each other and I tried to solve it using mediation skills. At first it did not work then I tried it more directly and it did.”

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“In an argument with a friend I was more open to negotiation and really listened to my friend’s point of view. I think this comes from being a mediator and learning mediation skills through SCRAM”.

All respondents *enjoyed the experience* immensely. Many mentioned what fun it was. This can be summed up in one student’s response: “I love it”. They said they liked collaborating with their peers, they enjoyed the roleplay and liked learning the skills involved, including feeling more confident in oral communication. It helped them see problems more clearly. Those who have gone on to help with peer mediation were thrilled to find they already knew the skills and aims, and were confident in using the mediation model.

Students’ comments on other aspects of the program

Organization

Without exception, participants valued the fact that they did not have to travel to attend the competition – that mediations were held at their own schools and that times were flexible. All students are heavily involved in academic and extra-curricular choice is enormous, thus organization had to be flexible and easy.

Most wished to meet with participants in other schools before the final: perhaps at a meeting after the first mediation, and then again at the every end in order to get to know other students and talk about SCRAM.. This suggestion was pursued in 2003, but there were not enough positive responses to set such meetings up. In all probability, the logistics involved and pressure of time mitigated against this.

The scenarios were, on the whole, not seen as realistic by the student participants, but not difficult. All but one was considered easy to understand. Some suggested using actual conflicts that had occurred. Some would have liked adult conflicts, if only for practice sessions (one group did this occasionally).

Students recognised that SCRAM as an extra-curricula activity required a big commitment, but because it was fun, it was an easy commitment to keep going.

Adjudication

On the whole, participants thought this was fair. A few adjudicators were regarded as too formal and “scary”, and a couple as rather destructive in their approach. “We could handle criticism, but it was the way in which it was done”, said one student. Others recognised that adjudication feedback was often done using the same principles as mediation – with the adjudicators asking the participants what they thought.

Fifteen of the 20 students thought it important that SCRAM should continue as a competition. They saw this made the program more interesting and more motivating. Individual trophies were very much appreciated as were letters from coaches.

Coaches

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Coaches were regarded as invaluable. Their time and help was very much appreciated. The students liked the way coaches treated them as adults. They did not tell them to be quiet, stop swearing, sit down, etc. Students also liked the way suggestions were made rather than being told what to do. Again, they recognised that coaching was done like mediation, with the coaches modelling the dispositions and skills required. They very much appreciated having knowledgeable coaches who were involved in mediation as part of their work and felt it important not to have teachers as coaches.

Teamwork

All considered their groups had worked well together, and supported each other. Individuals often took turns at being a party or a mediator. At least one school organised this rotation themselves (again they recognised this was done using a mediation-type approach). One person who was a stand-by, mentioned how much she had enjoyed watching the mediation even though she did not participate.

General comments and suggestions from students

Sixteen of 20 of the 2002/2003 student respondents agreed that conflict resolution education should be part of the school curriculum (two thought it should be voluntary and two thought it best done outside school hours). Many thought more people should be involved, or that all students should have some experience at mediation. It should be a whole class compulsory subject (one school did involve the whole class and then asked for volunteers for the SCRAM mediations).

Some students saw problems using the skills outside the SCRAM context because other people are not aware of the processes needed – an argument for involving all students in learning these skills and dispositions.

A few students saw a need to break the formal, adult approach to peer mediation – to use more friendly and informal approach. As a caveat, many students considered that if it were not fun, if it was taken too seriously, it would be difficult to maintain commitment. A few students thought only students who were interested should participate otherwise it would ruin the fun and the positivity of the program,

Without exception, the 2001 students in the focus groups wished to be involved again in the future. This was the case with most 2002/2003 participants – 15 out of 20 (88% of respondents who replied to this question) said they would like to continue participation. Some said only their year level could participate and hence they could not continue the next year.

Some students wanted a Year 11 SCRAM, or a Senior and Junior SCRAM. (One group wanted it in place of Mock Trials). Some felt debating and Mock Trials alienated people from each other. Other people said both types of skills were useful in different contexts. A few participants were looking forward to being involved in peer mediation and were glad of the orientating experience provided by SCRAM.

Two or three students in 2003 cohort thought the process boring because of the constant repetition of the stages and skills in mediation procedures, and the same number thought the scenarios unrealistic – that they should involve more family and other school conflicts rather than with friends.

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Examples of general comments from students were:

“We were really lucky to do it”.

“It was COOL!”

“It was thoroughly enjoyable, very well organised and a very worthwhile competition.”

“It was great fun. Worth the lunchtimes and afternoon training and being adjudicated”

Summary of students’ feedback

In summary, students thought they learned a great deal and, in most cases, could put this knowledge and skills into practice in other situations to improve relationships and solve interpersonal problems. They also enjoyed participating because it was seen as relevant, experiential, collaborative, and “fun”. A small minority did not enjoy what they regarded as too much repetition of mediation procedures and skills, and unrealistic scenarios. Many saw the long-term benefits for everyone and supported extension of learning such skills and attitudes to all students.

Teachers’ Feedback

Impact on students

Teachers felt, particularly in the case of some students, that they were much *more aware*, especially about listening to both sides of an argument. It had a huge impact on those directly involved. It was a paradigm shift for many of the students involved, as they are used to adversarial approaches and activities. One group was very excited when they saw how the process could work when at first it seemed not possible. Teachers gave at least three specific examples of students who had had some type of difficulty in *communication* before SCRAM and how participation had altered their approach and helped them.

They hoped the program would become more popular and have more status in the school over time, with 7 of 12 respondents (58%) considering SCRAM should be part of the school curriculum because of the possibility of reducing conflict in schools (100%), and others saying some form of mediation training would be worthwhile for all students. Some schools were deliberately making links to their peer mediation programmes, or thought they would do so in the future. One school mentioned they had not heard of students using the skills elsewhere, but considered they may use them later in the leadership positions which they were bound to reach. %

Teachers’ motivation

Most were already involved in peer mediation, school counselling, or were interested in developing such programmes. One said she “jumped at the opportunity to be involved in a pilot year. I was intrinsically motivated. It matched what I’d like to do.” Another mentioned

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that it may be difficult for his/her school to introduce peer mediation into the high school, so this was a good opportunity to do something. In general, teachers considered SCRAM was going in the same direction as the school wished to head – thus the program came at an opportune moment.

Teachers saw their role mostly as an organiser, but also as a supporter. They felt they had learned a great deal themselves by observing coaches and being involved with 100% indicating they had learned more about mediation as a result of their involvement.

Teachers' comments on other aspects

Organization:

All thought the competition very well organised in terms of information sharing, and flexibility of timing and location. Some commented that the organization was not an onerous job, though one considered the large amount of complex information should be simplified.

Some thought year 10 was a better level to involve than year 9. Some thought it should involve only one year level Others wished it to be something special for their Middle school students (year 9) to do.

Coaches:

The coaches were regarded as essential, especially in the first few years. They thought students saw the coaches from 'outside' the school and therefore having more legitimacy – it was not a case of "just another teacher telling students what to do."

Some suggested mediation workshops could be held for teachers as well, and that staff involved with SCRAM could have more training to take over or play a greater role in coaching in the future.

Adjudication:

Adjudication processes and outcomes were regarded by teachers as good, with just a few inconsistencies. They recognised that this may improve as adjudicators become more experienced, but that is always difficult to achieve consistency. Perhaps some moderating across adjudicators could be conducted in future.

Summary of teachers' views

Although only 58% of questionnaire respondents indicated they would participate in the future, but the reasons given were not related to the worthwhileness of the program but rather that the person was leaving the school, or other year teachers would be given responsibility. All staff interviewed were willing and keen to be involved again. They recognised a successful program would need at least one staff member to take the lead. Mostly this depended on teachers' time and their other extra-mural activities and commitments. Although it was a big commitment, it was worth it.

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Coaches' Feedback

All coaches considered SCRAM should be part of the school curriculum, with 92% saying it could help reduce destructive conflict in schools. Some of their reasons are reflected in the quotes from the experiences of some coaches involved in the first year are described below. First with respect to communicating with the school:

Communication with the teacher and team was great. This was facilitated by the fact the teacher, school counsellor and the school generally were very supportive of SCRAM and the fact that I am a parent at the school. The timing for meetings was difficult because the students involved were very busy & committed in other areas of extra curricular endeavour. I don't see any way to improve this problem!

Their comments on the level of enthusiasm shown by their school's teacher(s), students and others connected with the school are as follows:

Extremely high level of commitment & enthusiasm. They paid for the school counsellor to do the LEADR training course. The teacher was very committed to the team and the process and they are going to set up a peer mediation programme in the Junior School.

The level of enthusiasm of the school and students was great. I really only had contact with the teacher but I know he was supported by the Principal and other teachers. The teacher has an Academic Talent Program (ATP)-Humanities -class. Eight students chose to participate, 5 boys and 3 girls. Their commitment and enthusiasm remained very strong throughout the competition. They were a rewarding group of students to work with. The balance of the class completed a group project for assessment in which they were required to design a peer mediation program to be used in the middle school. They then presented their program to a member of staff. As a result the whole class learnt about mediation and its application to schools

In regard to the impact coaches thought the program had on students, they said:

I think the students have benefited a great deal from participating in SCRAM. I have had feedback from the school counsellor that at least two of the girls have used their new skills & knowledge when dealing with difficult family situations. I observed one of the girls in the team grow in confidence and so to her ability to move from a positional stance, to a point of view that took into account her & other's interests and suggest creative solutions to a problem. I know the girls used interest based negotiation principles when trying to work out how their photo for the school magazine should be taken. When the photographer finally suggested that they vote on it (out of desperation I am sure) the team replied in unison "We don't compromise- we mediate!"

I think the 8 students in the competition learnt a lot, mainly about communication skills and negotiation. Their informal feedback to me was that they had learnt a lot of skills that they were finding useful in other

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aspects of their life. They all agreed that it had been worthwhile being in the competition and said they would recommend it to other students.

I believe everyone involved learned something about mediation, but there was considerable variation between individuals. The teacher was very positive about the benefits and very interested in the principles and skills involved. Some student comments:

** I didn't even know what mediation was when someone asked me to be on the team - now I find I can do better when my friends come to me with their problems.*

** It's hard being the mediator.*

** Can I break their legs? (frustrated student mediator who said he didn't like the role at all - this student wants to be a lawyer and was (coincidentally) at the Legal Centre for work experience).*

Coaches' comments on other aspects

I thought the organisation was terrific. Materials could be made available on the web

I think the organisers did a great job this year. There is always scope for improvement. My teacher and I suggested after the second round that there should be some attention to moderating the adjudicators' results. ... it might be better to use video, followed by a moderation session.

All coaches would be willing to act as a SCRAM coach again, as evidenced from examples of their quotes below, as well as from questionnaire responses:

Yes ...and get the school counsellor on side & involved!

I would be prepared to coach again. I think it is important to spend quite a bit of time with students at the start, then try to get them to coach each other more as the year proceeds. I would be interested to see if this year's students could help coach next year, but timetabling is the biggest problem.

Yes. Be clear about how much time you can commit to at the beginning and be sure the school is able to provide a teacher who is able to give adequate time to the program.

Yes, make sure everybody has a go at mediating and role-playing - don't select at all. I made the whole exercise a team performance and they approached it this way and built new relationships between themselves as a result. Role-playing is as important and necessary that students understand why.

And on adjudication:

There was a great deal of variation here. Some adjudicators gave useful feedback, one said very little. I think there should be a standard de-brief

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form, and adjudicators should be asked to comment on say, 2 things that were done very well by mediators, and role players, and 2 things they could do better.

Adjudications went particularly well, feedback very encouraging and appropriate. Adjudicators provided well thought out comments in most cases, however there was a marked difference between the two adjudicators who were experienced mediators and the one who was not so experienced.

Generally, positive feedback given in a way that the students thought was constructive.

Summary of coaches' views

Overall, the views of the coaches can be gleaned from the following quotes:

I think that overall it has been a very positive experience, for our school at the very least. The programme has been mentioned in a letter sent home to parents from the Headmistress, and the Deputy Head is involved on a committee which includes the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of WA and his comments to the Deputy were very positive regarding SCRAM. It has provided an impetus to open up the possibilities of further conflict /dispute resolution initiatives within the curriculum.

From our point of view, the pilot year of SCRAM was a small step towards "spreading the word" about consensual conflict resolution. We certainly applaud the recognition that there is a need for some ADR training at secondary school level. We would like to see become much more widespread and eventually form part of the curriculum.

*I wrote a letter of thanks to the adjudicators before seeing this survey saying:
"I thoroughly enjoyed my role as coach and I believe that programs such as SCRAM contribute to "spreading the word" about mediation". I think it rates highly not so much because of the "competition" but because so many people are involved (students, teachers, parents etc).*

Very successful - not only did it reach all the students but many of the parents have gotten interested and asked questions.

Adjudicators' Feedback

Firstly, in regard to the level of enthusiasm for SCRAM shown by the schools' teacher(s), students and others, adjudicators said:

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The level of enthusiasm for SCRAM was evident in the questions that were asked, everyone was on time for the role play and the feedback I got after was good.

Very high. very excited by the concept and by the program.

All teachers I had contact with were very enthusiastic - as were the students and parents. However, at finals one teacher (from a school where I did not judge, so I had not met him before) said he was not happy about the standard of judging in preliminary stages. He believed one adjudicator was much too lenient and one much too hard ... no apparent "middle road".

In regard to whether they thought students learned about mediation and conflict resolution, adjudicators said:

I think they did learn skills - how it is followed up in real life is the key

I think the students learned a great deal about conflict resolution and that was evidenced again in the questions and feedback after the session.

You could tell that early in the piece the way of approaching a problem was very new to them - also speaking in public so it was a bit compounded. however some of the interventions made and outcomes suggested indicated that they were getting the hang of it.

I believe students have learned a great deal from the exercise - and it has sparked a lot of interest among the teachers I spoke to.

Summary of adjudicators' views

All adjudicators would wish to be involved in SCRAM in the future. When asked how they would rate the pilot year of SCRAM on the goals of "spreading the word" about consensual conflict resolution and abiding by the principles of mediation, adjudicators said the following:

Good, I think the students would probably carry some of what they learned forward

I am very impressed by it and if other schools express an interest believe it would be a great program.

Absolutely positive.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that all participants valued the SCRAM experience and thought it should be extended to more people, both students and teachers, in different ways – the most popular being by integration in the curriculum. All groups involved mentioned reasons such as development of important life skills and knowledge about non-adversarial ways of

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resolving disagreement, and considered the SCRAM program an excellent way of advancing these skills and knowledge. An analysis (Zariski, 2002) of how each Learning area incorporates, and therefore may address the aims of conflict resolution, is presented in the Appendix.

Changes in knowledge, attitudes and dispositions in students (and teachers to some cases) as a result of participation in the program, were noted by students, teachers, coaches and adjudicators, with the first two groups reporting changes generalising to situations outside the context of the SCRAM program.

It is argued here that the SCRAM program is one very effective way of achieving or enhancing the skills, knowledge and dispositions mentioned in the Framework with respect to all learning areas, as well as the goals of personal development and school management. The evaluation of this program over three years provides evidence of its efficacy as judged by students, teachers and others involved in the program. Our hope is that its use in schools may be extended every year.

Appendix 1

Table 1. Frequency of affirmative responses to four questions about conflict resolution education from five groups of respondents in 2002 and 2003 combined. (Figures in brackets indicate missing responses. Percentages in italics using frequencies without missing data)

Number of respondents		Groups of respondents 2002/2003			
		Students	Teachers	Coaches and adjudicators	Parents and others
Total: 65		20	12	12	21
56 86%	Should conflict resolution education be part of the school curriculum?	16 80%	7 58%	12 100%	21 100%
54 93%	Has participation in SCRAM increased your knowledge of conflict resolution?	19 95%	12 100%	8 (3) 89%	15 (2) 79%
54 84%	Could SCRAM help reduce destructive conflict in schools?	13 65%	12 100%	11 92%	18 (1) 90%
39 81%	Would you participate in SCRAM in the future?	15 (3) 88%	7 (5) 58%	7 (5) 100%	10 (9) 83%

Appendix 2

Conflict resolution across the curriculum

There are many opportunities created by the Curriculum Framework for the introduction or expansion of conflict resolution education as a topic of study in Western Australian Schools. Some examples that can be identified in the learning areas are given below:

Arts

Learning activities in the Arts area are intended to give students opportunities to “develop collaborative skills, such as managing group dynamics, negotiation, leadership and delegation. “ Students should also be encouraged to manage conflicts of opinion constructively and become “aware of the impact of their opinions and values on others when they make critical evaluations of arts works.”

English

English is expected to develop critical literacy in students and this encompasses awareness of the role of language in conflict:

A crucial feature of critical literacy is an awareness of the relationship between language and power. Students need to understand that well-developed language skills provide them with access to sources of power through knowledge; that the control of language and communication confers power on those in control and disempowers others; that language can be used to influence their behaviour and that they can use language to influence the behaviour of others; and that a knowledge of language and how it works can be used to resist control by others.

Students of English are to be taught to understand the effects of language on others:

Students may, for example, identify the negative effect of name-calling on someone's self-esteem; recognise the negative attitude towards a social group encouraged by stereotyping in a cartoon; show how the use of the passive voice in a news report avoids attributing responsibility for an action; discuss how Australian films reflect certain conceptions of national identity; or analyse the construction of gender in a poem.

English students are also to be taught good listening skills and to speak purposefully in a variety of contexts.

These learning outcomes are intrinsic to conflict resolution education.

As regards teaching strategies the English area of the framework notes that students could be given the chance to engage in “peer conferencing, tutoring and peer assessment”. One might appropriately add peer mediation here.

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Health and physical education

In the learning area of health and physical education conflict resolution education is expressly mentioned:

Effective interpersonal skills are essential for participation in meaningful and fulfilling relationships in family, school, recreation, work and community contexts. Interpersonal skills such as assertive communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, cooperation and leadership enable students to act responsibly and contribute effectively to groups and teams.

This learning area is also expected to further attitudes and values that include students' "willingness to seek a compromise in situations in which conflicting views are evident, while protecting their own rights." As regards interpersonal skills students are expected to "possess the interpersonal skills of negotiation, assertiveness, conflict resolution, collaboration, cooperation and leadership in family, school, sport, work, cultural pursuits and social situations." Learning activities should include working in groups which "enables students to be challenged by the views and skills of others and extends their abilities to handle collaboration and competition, conflict and teamwork." Students should also learn how to "make decisions that allow them to manage stress, report domestic violence or harassment by peers."

The health and physical education area expressly invites conflict resolution education to help further its aims and objectives.

Society and environment

The learning area of Society and Environment might be expected to deal extensively with conflicts among people, but this is not reflected in the Curriculum Framework. Where conflict was openly acknowledged in connection with games and sports, it is not as prominent in the discussion of government, rights, "social competence" and "civic responsibility". Perhaps this shows a reluctance to deal directly with political issues in the Framework.

On the other hand, prominence is given to the function of markets in resolving competing wants and needs:

They understand the importance of markets in meeting needs through the exchange of goods and services. Market forces help to determine the value that is placed upon resources and the unequal distribution of wealth that may result. Students identify the unequal distribution of resources among people and how this has led to patterns of relative wealth and poverty over the earth. They evaluate these patterns and the policies that may be responsible for them, and make judgments about the unequal distribution of these resources. They also consider options for a fairer distribution of the world's resources and their responsibilities as consumers of limited resources.

However, no mention is made of non-market methods of resolving conflicting needs or how the "options for fairer distribution" might be pursued. Conflict resolution education could have something to offer to supplement the study of markets. It might take the form, for instance, of learning about negotiations between nations over transborder resources.

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It is in the learning outcome of “Active Citizenship” that conflict is closer to being acknowledged and commented on in this learning area:

Students critically analyse their heritages and traditions, institutions and organisations. Through this analysis, they demonstrate behaviours consistent with the values associated with the democratic process, such as acknowledging individual freedom and the rights and responsibilities of participating in a democracy; respect for the law and for legitimate and just authority; respect for different choices, viewpoints and ways of living; and ethical behaviour and equitable participation in decision making.

Students critically analyse heritages and traditions of social justice and human rights, and policies and practices related to discrimination and disadvantage. Through this analysis they demonstrate behaviours consistent with the values associated with social justice, such as a respect and concern for the welfare, contribution, rights and dignity of all people; empathy with people of different belief systems and cultural groups; fairness and equity in dealing with people; and redressing disadvantage and changing discriminatory and violent practices.

Conflict resolution education could contribute much to achieving the overarching learning outcomes and values in this learning area.

Finally, the outcome of “active citizenship” is said to involve some skill in conflict resolution:

Students demonstrate behaviours and practices of active citizenship by using ideas of social justice and the democratic process to evaluate social situations, decisions and change: for example, they plan more just and democratic ways of relating to others and organise group work democratically and efficiently to promote group participation and cohesion. They resolve conflicts by accepting people’s strengths and weaknesses, knowing when and how to disagree, and by jointly proposing and acting on solutions to interpersonal issues.

Resources provided for teachers in this learning area include a subject guide for year 11 students – Political and Legal Studies (http://www.curriculum.wa.edu.au/files/doc/285_1.doc). Although this document states that students should be able to “discuss the avenues available to individuals to resolve conflict” it focuses exclusively on litigation and political processes. Mediation is not mentioned.

The Society and Environment learning area is clearly ripe for the introduction of conflict resolution education.

Technology and enterprise

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the Technology and Enterprise learning area expressly introduces conflict as a theme. In connection with understanding the impact of technologies, the Framework states:

Students understand that the creation, adaptation and application of technology is dependent on achieving a balance between the responsibilities of the designer and the developer, and the needs of the user. Students consider their own attitudes, cultural

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beliefs and values and those of others, as well as long- and short-term consequences of innovations for individuals, families, communities and environments. They come to understand that making decisions about technology often involves a complex mixture of consensus, conflict and compromise, as humans seek to meet needs and realise opportunities in a sustainable way.

Clearly this learning area provides an opportunity for students to learn about processes of conflict resolution that enhance sustainability in society and the environment.