There are many ways to assess the effectiveness of school conflict resolution training (CRT) programs. Some methods require extensive resources, but others, conducted by CRT practitioners themselves, also provide useful information. This digest presents a
framework for CRT evaluation by practitioners which enables them to reflect productively on their practice.

**ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

To determine the effectiveness of their CRT program, practitioners need answers to the following questions:

* What are the program objectives (i.e., establishment of a peaceful, orderly classroom, constructive student management of their conflicts, improvement of grades)?

* What determines achievement of these objectives (i.e., a decrease in fights, victimization, verbal abuse, hurt feelings, discrimination, disorder; an increase in the willingness of students to face problems openly and resolve conflicts cooperatively, better working and social relations)?

* Can practitioner observations, student self-reports, and reports by others about the students provide information on positive changes from CRT?

* If the CRT program appears successful, is it because of real improvement in the students behavior; because of students good CR skills prior to training; or because of an unrelated factor (i.e., increased maturity of the students, the introduction of some other change in the curriculum, school, or neighborhood)?

* If CRT seems to have failed, how can the causes be determined? If poor results are common, are they due to identifiable inadequacies in the CRT program; to inadequate training or support for successful program implementation; or to a countering influence in the school, families, or neighborhood? If poor results are not common, are there differences in the way successful teachers implement CRT, or do the differences result from differences in the student groups being taught?

**WHAT TO MEASURE**

The objective of most CRT programs is to enable students to initiate and develop a constructive process of resolution when in a conflict. Thus, useful assessment of a CRT program measures student attributes such as these:

- Knowledge

Assessing this variable elicits student knowledge of the basic concepts of constructive conflict resolution and the typical steps involved in a mediation process.
* Orientation, Attitudes, and Emotions

This assessment determines student acquisition of the orientation, attitudes, and emotional responses to conflict which facilitate constructive resolution: their development of a cooperative (win-win) rather than a competitive (win-lose) orientation to conflict, with positive rather than negative expectations about the CR processes and outcomes. Assessment might also cover the CRT programs effects on social attitudes such as alienation, trust, suspicion, ethnocentrism, and authoritarianism.

* Skills

The ultimate measure of the effectiveness of a CRT program is whether the students acquire and use skills needed for constructive conflict resolution such as these:

* Ability to reduce tension; find common ground between oneself and the other; establish a friendly working relationship; and support, encourage, and enhance the other.

* Ability to reframe the conflict as a mutual problem to be resolved cooperatively.

* Effective and responsive mutual communication, and active listening to the other, which involve understanding the meaning and emotions of the communication.

* Perspective taking and role reversal, which involve empathetic understanding of one's own, and the others, position and underlying needs, and the ability to differentiate between them.

* Ability to problem solve by diagnosing the nature of the conflict and generating feasible solutions.

* Personal impulse control (e.g., resistance to overreaction, anger, ethnocentrism, defensiveness), and the ability to respond to the others similar emotions.

* Behavior in Different Situations

People are sometimes more able to manage their conflicts successfully in certain types of situations than in others, with certain people, and about certain types of issues. Thus it is useful to know what is problematic for a student.

While it is likely that the knowledge acquired in CRT can be transferred to situations characterized by strong norms of cooperation and prosocial values, a transfer to a
situation characterized by less socially constructive norms can make CR approaches
difficult. Issues that threaten personal or important group identities, esteem, security, or
survival are difficult to resolve, as are disputes with a long history of contentiousness.
Conflicts over basic values, relative power, relative status, possession of limited
resources vital to security, esteem, or identity are also difficult to resolve constructively
unless the parties involved in the conflict are highly skilled and strongly committed to the
CR process.

HOW TO MEASURE

There are a number of different ways to elicit information for assessment of conflict
resolution training:
* Observation of actual behaviors in real conflict situations is probably the most
persuasive form of data collection. Teachers in ongoing contact with their students can
observe changes in conflict resolution behaviors in their classrooms. Teachers may also
observe simulated conflicts by devising a conflict situation, assigning students to take a
given role in it, and then observing their efforts at resolution.

* Interviews and questionnaires involve obtaining reports from the students about their
own knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behavior in conflict situations. Teachers can also
obtain reports from others who observe a students behavior (e.g., fellow students,
friends, parents, teachers, supervisors).

* Diaries in which a student records daily experiences with conflict can be valuable,
especially if a framework or set of questions is provided as a guide.

* Data found in school records can also help determine whether violence, delinquency,
vandalism, disciplinary cases, absenteeism or truancy, health complaints, depression,
and neurotic symptoms have decreased; and whether school grades, voluntary actions
to help the class or school, and cooperative activities among teachers have improved.

RESOURCES

Some valuable references are available for practitioners doing their own assessments.

* Learning Through Reflection

Coleman, The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice. San Francisco:

An excellent chapter, and its reference list contains additional useful reading, such as:


* Research Methods


A classic textbook on research methods with excellent chapters on all aspects of research, including interviewing, questionnaire construction, and observation methods.


Contains descriptions and examples of widely employed measures of personality and social attitudes, some of which may be influenced by CRT.

* Research Studies


Contains measures for assessing the effects of CRT.


Presents a relevant summary of research findings in the editors own chapter, "Research Findings on What Works."

Reviews impacts on students, educators, diverse populations, and school and classroom climate.


Reviews research on school violence prevention programs.


Describes various ingenious measuring instruments for preschoolers, as well as measures for use with parents and day care staff. (Contact Dr. S.V. Sandy at the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution, Box 53, Teachers College, Columbia University, NY, NY 10027.)


Describes a series of studies, including measures used with K-9 students. (Contact Professor David W. Johnson at the University of Minnesota, 60 Peik Hall, Minneapolis, MN, 55455.)


Reports on systematic research, using very interesting measures, with children in elementary grades. (Contact Professor John L. Aber at the National Center For Children in Poverty, Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University, New York, NY 10032.)


Reports on extensive research, using a variety of well-developed measures, on students in elementary, middle, and high schools. (Contact Professor Tricia S. Jones at the Department of Communication Sciences, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, 19122.)

Presents systematic questionnaires for evaluating CRT for use with adults who were trained and other instruments for use with people who know the trainees well, and can report on changes in the behavior of the trainees. (Contact Professor Peter Coleman at the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution, address above.)

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This Digest was developed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. ED-99-CO-0035. The opinions in this Digest do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

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**Title:** Practitioner Assessment of Conflict Resolution Programs. ERIC Digest Number 163.

**Document Type:** Information Analyses---ERIC Information Analysis Products (IAPs) (071); Information Analyses---ERIC Digests (Selected) in Full Text (073);


**Descriptors:** Conflict Resolution, Elementary Secondary Education, Problem Solving, Program Effectiveness, Program Evaluation, Student Behavior, Teacher Role

**Identifiers:** ERIC Digests

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