

Bring Peace to Arizona's Schools
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Section I

The goal of this peace project was to give teachers the tools to provide youth in Arizona with an understanding about how conflict resolution is linked to identity. Working with teachers was a unique opportunity because while adults have identities that are complex, children are still developing their sense of self in school and introducing conflict resolution to the classroom gives students the tools to see conflict as neutral and manageable by working through conflicts.

The project was an opportunity for teachers to take part in conflict resolution workshops to understand how their identity shapes their view of conflict in and outside of the classroom. All participants took a conflict style assessment to see how they experienced conflict in their personal lives. Throughout the workshop, we referred back to the assessment to highlight that in the same way that we have different conflict styles, we also have different styles for how we resolve conflict and all of this can be taught in the classroom. Participants were given a practical workbook that followed the format of the workshop and included numerous resources for enhancing their lesson plans with conflict resolution activities. I collaborated with the Arizona Association for Conflict Resolution (AACR) in organizing the four workshops for teachers to give them an introduction to conflict resolution and how it can be applied in the classroom. The Arizona Association for Conflict Resolution is a non-profit organization with the goal of promoting the recruitment, training, continuing education and skill development of conflict resolution and collaborative decision-making. The AACR supported the process the entire way through: from advertising to serving as guest speakers, members of the organization were happy to participate in bringing conflict resolution to teachers through this project. In doing so, we were able to teach more than 50 teachers about what conflict resolution is and how to include it in their classrooms.

I worked with both the current and former president of AACR to make the necessary logistical arrangements for the workshops and for guidance on what material to use in the training sessions. Once the dates were set, we invited members of AACR to help find guest speakers for each of the workshops to cover an introductory mediation training. The current and former presidents of AACR volunteered for two of the workshops and a board member of AACR and the coordinator of the Peer Mediation Youth Conference volunteered for the other two. I then selected two colleagues with a background in conflict resolution and education to help me prepare for and facilitate the workshops. Together we created a flyer, website (azcrworkshop.wordpress.com), event page (eventbrite.com), and workshop materials.

There were a few challenges in order to ensure that the conflict resolution workshops came together but they were not what I initially expected. The first step was to decide on the days to make room and flight reservations. Finding available rooms on four dates in a two-week period took longer than expected because the cost for many locations was so high. Also, I had planned on organizing a special workshop for teachers, administrators, and parents of the students at Genesis City, a community-based organization that empowers its students to continue their education but we were ultimately unable to work together to arrange a special training. I invited the members of the Genesis City community to attend the workshops on the dates we had settled on and began advertising. We made a flyer and website and started sending it to school districts, university departments, teacher organizations, non-profits, friends, and family members. The problem here was that many schools in Arizona were unwilling or unable to reach out to teachers that were finishing the academic year at their schools. Still, I asked anyone I spoke to to spread the word and hoped that enough people would find out about the workshop series.

What had initially been an overarching goal of getting as many attendants as possible turned into a series of more interactive workshops where participants were able to get to know each other and comfortably share the challenges they face in their classrooms. The workshops inspired deep discussions and thoughtful brainstorming of ways that students could benefit from learning their conflict style and practicing conflict resolution skills and techniques in the classroom. Also, we emphasized that peace education was best taught by the example set by teachers and staff and enhanced with lessons about conflict resolution. The education obtained in the workshops will be sustained by the teachers and students that have been exposed to the practices of conflict resolution who will use peaceful strategies to teach others about valuing each others' diversity rather than conflicting over differences.

Section II

As stated by Mary Parker Follett *"I should like to ask you to agree for the moment to think of conflict as neither good nor bad; to consider it without ethical prejudgment; to think of it not as warfare, but as the appearance of difference, difference of opinions, of interests. For that is what conflict means – difference. ... As conflict is here in the world, as we cannot avoid it, we should, I think, use it. Instead of condemning it, we should set it to work for us."* (1925). I would like to define peace in regards to this definition of peace. For me, peace can be defined by conflicts that are handled in a way that respects the difference of each unique individual involved.

In the upcoming school year and years to come, the teachers that attended the workshops will work in classrooms across the state of Arizona to introduce conflict resolution strategies to their students. I was able to contact and donate extra conflict style inventories and workbooks to the participants that wanted to share what they had learned at their schools. In total, I hope that hundreds of students in Arizona over the coming years receive conflict resolution education. I will be following up with the participants of the workshops in a few months and sending them an evaluation to see if they were able to use the skills and strategies from the workshop in their classes. Also, I will update the website with additional resources for teachers to find information about conflict resolution education. This will ensure sustainability because teachers can always refer to what they learned at the workshops and spread their knowledge and use of conflict resolution to the students in their classrooms. Many participants asked about upcoming workshop or training opportunities so we directed them to the Arizona Association for Conflict Resolution. AACR will host an annual Peer Mediation Conference in November open to high school students in Arizona. The goal is to introduce peer mediation programs to schools and train students to mediate disputes between their classmates. AACR members will volunteer their time, talent, and experience to provide an introduction to conflict resolution in school settings. I plan to attend and help facilitate the training this year and in years to come. Finally, the remaining funds from the grant, \$1,000, will be donated to AACR to help fund this year's Peer Mediation Conference.

This peace project was a remarkable experience that took me on a long journey starting in November of last year. Facilitating a training workshop for educators has changed my view of teachers. I have always had a deep appreciation for the field of education but considering how much teachers have to offer and seeing how willing they were to learn was even more humbling. Through all of the preparation and organization, I feel fortunate that I was able to facilitate and inspire dialogue about a topic I am deeply passionate about. In doing the project, I have shifted my career focus on preparing professional development training materials and workshops in the future. This experience has motivated me to continue looking for opportunities to help develop conflict resolution trainings with non-profit organizations, including International House. I hope to work with many more teachers and students in the future and spread peace through conflict resolution education.

"You can't take the 'you' out of conflict resolution. I have learned through this project that this is true not only of the students but also of the teachers. In order to really teach resolution and create peace in the classroom, the teacher has to model conflict resolution practices. Anyone that models conflict resolution can be a teacher of peace." – Elizabeth Hernandez

