

ABSTRACT

Conflict Resolution and Mediation: Skills for Youth Empowerment and Democracy

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The purpose of the Barbados Youth Service Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation pilot project (BYS CRPM) was to reduce violence and disruption at BYS by teaching students how to deal with conflict. Providing a test case for replicating similar programs in other Barbadian schools was a secondary objective.

The project consisted of two programs implemented September to August over two years: Project Year 1 (PY1) 2003-2004 and Project Year 2 (PY2) 2004-2005. In PY1 all students (n=87) received conflict resolution and violence prevention training over 12 weeks, 13 students were trained in mediation, teachers received conflict resolution training and were trained in mediation along with some staff. In PY2, the conflict resolution training component was reduced because of the school's conflicting interests, however, 18 mediators were trained and teachers received a mediation refresher course. Parents were offered half-day seminars in PY1 and PY2 at which about one third attended. In both project years a few mediations took place (three in PY1 and two in PY2) and a small number of referrals.

Evaluation using pre- and post-tests for PY1 and PY2 did not show significant changes in school conflict however, anecdotal evidence from personal

interviews showed the program had a positive impact especially on those who participated in mediation training.

Conflict resolution and mediation training that includes communication methods, problem solving, and understanding others' perspectives can help prepare young people for democracy and effect social change in non-violent ways. However, to truly achieve empowerment, young people must learn that the roots of violence are found in social inequalities drawn across race, gender and age. Exploring these inequalities as they relate to them personally can help young people break free of the influences that perpetuate an unfair socio-economic system and guide them toward a spirit of community.

Keywords:

Conflict resolution, mediation, democracy, empowerment, community.