

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chicago Foundation for Education: Teachers Network Leadership Institute
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QUESTION

What happens when I teach and practice problem solving skills in my first grade classroom?

- How do students think they should solve interpersonal problems?
- How do students actually solve interpersonal problems?
- Do they demonstrate any of the skills that they learned in class?
- Which teacher problem solving skills are effective for me and my students?

RATIONALE

The frequency of physical violence and aggression that I observed in my classroom motivated me to investigate interpersonal problem solving skills that I could teach my students. Three problems solving skills I used were:

- *The Peace Path* – This strategy guides children through the steps of problem solving while they physically walk on footprints on a path.
- *Decisions with a Partner* – This is a process that helps two students make a decision in a fair way.
- *Modeling* – The way I solve problems as the teacher serves as an example of acceptable problem solving in the classroom.

TOOLS

- *Student interviews*: Students were interviewed once in January and once in March about problem solving. An aid administered the interviews using a tape recorder.
- *Socio-gram*: The information gathered from the interviews about which students the class likes to or does not like to work with was represented visually with a socio-gram.
- *Videos*: The six students that I focused on were videotaped working with partners that I assigned and partners that they identified as students they like to work with.
- *Teacher Journal*: From October through March I recorded my reflections in a weekly journal. I documented the incidents in my classroom that stood out to me as related to problem solving.

DATA & ANALYSIS

Student Interviews:

- Students used and applied the problem-solving skills that were practiced in authentic settings in the classroom.

Socio-gram:

- Students were more willing to work with a greater number of students as the year progressed.
- The aggressive students in my class were not undesirable to work with and were actually among the most popular to work with.

Video:

- Students problem-solved better when they were able to determine who they worked with.

Teacher Journal:

- I saw greater success when I created a stable environment with clearly defined roles.
- I saw greater success when I anticipated student needs, gave special attention, took time for bonding and positive reinforcement.
- The class was able to calm down after an outburst when I kept a calm, firm demeanor in handling aggressive student behavior.
- Students were able to recover after aggressive or disruptive behavior when I redefined their identity through positive identity statements, ‘think alouds’ about what their feelings might be and reinterpretations of their actions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Character education should not be based on a program or curriculum but on staff development regarding social-emotional needs of students at each age group.
- Choice time, free play time or recess is an important environment for social learning and identity development.
- Teachers should learn student preferences for who they think they’ll work well with.
- Mentoring for new teachers should promote:
 - ways to prevent outbursts by building good classroom community
 - reflection on finding their calm, firm demeanor
 - education on positive identity development