The effects of conflict resolution and peer mediation training on Turkish elementary school students’ conflict resolution strategies

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The effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation (CRPM) training among 10- and 11-year-old elementary school students was examined. The CRPM training program consisted of skills, such as understanding the nature of interpersonal conflicts, communication, anger management, negotiation and peer mediation. The research was carried out using pretest/posttest-quasi-experimental design. The sample included 591 students; 326 in the experiment and 265 in the control group. A self-report questionnaire which consisted of four subscales (integrative/constructive, smoothing, forcing and withdrawing/avoidance) was used to collect data related to conflict resolution strategies. The CRPM training program significantly improved students’ ‘integrative/constructive’ conflict resolution strategy and reduced their ‘forcing’ and ‘withdrawing/avoidance’ strategies. However, no statistically significant difference was found in the ‘smoothing’ strategy. When boys’ and girls’ results were examined separately, boys’ ‘integrative/constructive’ conflict resolution strategy scores increased after the training, while their ‘forcing’ scores decreased. CRPM training was not found to be effective in girls.

Keywords: conflict resolution; peer mediation; conflict resolution strategies

Introduction

In general, interpersonal conflict is described as ‘instances when incompatible activities take place among individuals’ (Deutsch 1971, as cited in Borisof 1998, 2). Such incompatible activities leading to interpersonal conflicts are natural and unavoidable in schools where, in each classroom, 20–40 individuals with different cultural backgrounds, values, personalities and objectives are randomly brought together for an elemental purpose such as education. How these interpersonal conflicts should be handled in schools, of course, is an important educational issue. Bush and Saltarelli (2000) argue that formal schooling and training can play an essential role in conflict transformation. Peace education as one approach to conflict transformation, for instance, seeks to initiate or support an educational process that allows students to articulate, to accommodate, and to accept differences between and within groups that lead to conflict (Bush and Saltarelli 2000).

Schools are not merely venues where a certain body of knowledge is transferred to students and received by them, but are also places where vital life skills are