

School conflict case study

Business



This case study examines the conflict over whether public schools in the United States of America should teach biology from the viewpoint of evolution or of creation, according to the Christian Bible. Although this battle has raged for several decades, it is still an emotionally charged, often-debated issue.

Through research on this subject, one finds the term “intelligent design,” and while this initially sounds like there may be a third contingency in this debate, upon closer examination, one finds that “intelligent design” is tantamount to creationism. Likewise one finds the term “environmental creationism,” which is also a pseudonym for creationism. Those who believe in evolution contend that their view is the result of scientifically verifiable non-biased information.

Those who believe in creationism contend that the Christian Bible is a book written through divine inspiration and therefore, whatever is written in the Bible is the ultimate authority. Basically the evolutionists believe they are correct because their information can be proven scientifically, while the creationists believe that their information is from an infallible source that is more certain than the evolutionists’ scientific data.

Since public schools are supported by public taxes, some believe that church and state must be kept separate. This is supported by the fact that, “the federal government has repeatedly denied the introduction of creationism into public schools as it is a direct violation of the separation of church and state (Lace, Hemlock, & Welfare, 2010, p. 253). Yet, it is also believed that

the preferences of the local citizenry should be consulted In deciding which theory or theories should be taught In public school biology.

Currently local school boards actually seem to hold sway over what type of orientation their local schools will use In logy. Even when there are state or local rulings favoring one side or the other. Some classroom teachers include their personal preferences (or those of their “ in Dover, Pennsylvania, the school board adopted a general policy endorsing “ intelligent design” and district administrators composed the statement that was read to high school biology classes as they began the evolution unit” (Learner, 2002, p. 87).

Some attempts toward reconciliation of these viewpoints have resulted in having both viewpoints presented in the biology classrooms of certain districts. This idea was condoned by the George W.

Bush administration in 2005, stating that children should be exposed to multiple ideas in school” (Warwick, p. 305). Another problem with presenting both evolution and the creationism in the classroom occurs when one tries to qualify which type of creationism is to be taught.

The most commonly known creation story from the book of Genesis in the Christian Bible; however, there are actually 3 different versions of creation within the book of Genesis, some resembling the ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamia creation stories, with a substitution of one God for many gods (Carson-Newman University, 2013). Another Christian variant of creationist theory is that of “ intelligent design” which argues that Darwinian science does not contradict the Bible, while maintaining that a super-being planned transformation of species Monsoon, 2011, p. 5).

Lastly, there is the version called “ environmental creationism:” in which “ the use of creationist language is employed without the explicit Christian context” (Nelson, 2010, p. 513). What can be done as the battle over creationism versus evolution rages on in courtrooms and at state and local school board meetings across our nation? As mentioned previously, some localities have settled on including both sides’ viewpoints; however, it is difficult to present both possibilities without bias because they come from different schools of thought.

The evolutionists believe scientific fact to be ultimate truth, yet the creationists consider the word of God to be the ultimate truth. Is there a way to honor the U. S.

Constitution and the taxpayers simultaneously, some of whom believe in creation and some of whom believe in evolution? If we decide to include both creationism and evolution and to consider the debate rhetorical, we run the risk of neither side being satisfied because there are those on OTOH sides who believe that their way is the only way and who want to “ win” the battle.

If traditional approaches have not settled this issue, then perhaps it is time to try alternative dispute resolution measures, the attempts to present both evolution and creationism in the classroom, notwithstanding. Peter Dolman (2006, p. 544) writes that “ intractable conflicts are rooted in the ways we make sense of the world and are not solvable in the traditional sense. ” He further states that, “ It is primarily through assumptions about what is unquestionably “ right,” in a given context that efferent groups develop and

maintain incommensurate worldviews and conflicts persist (Dolman, 2006, p. 45).

” Our issue here is obviously one of intractable conflict. Our issue is not one in which both sides desire to reach a win-win solution; however, productive outcomes will depend on introduction of the principles of negotiation, beginning with the foundational abilities for conflict resolution. Negotiation is defined by Bruce Patton (2005, p. 279) as “ back and forth communication designed to reach an agreement between two or more parties with some interests that are shared and others that may conflict or simply be different.

It will also be important to emphasize the relative nature of truth and its importance. Employing facilitated Set the stage 2.

Gather perspectives 3. Identify interests 4. Create options 5. Evaluate options 6. Generate agreement (1998, p. 59,) may serve to lessen the hostilities which mask the issues.

Realizing that resolution/negotiation will be drawn out over a long period of time, can serve as a starting point, as it will be important in this case for both sides to hear the other’s perspectives in a non-threatening environment before they can move beyond hostility.

Issue: Should schools teach Evolution or Creation? Interested Parties:

Creationists and Evolutionists Creationists Needs/illnesses: Interests:

Evolutionists Needs/ To teach the “ truth” about biology according to the

Christian bible To teach the “ truth” about biology according to Charles

Darwin and other scientists Positional Bargaining: To be “ right” Positional

Bargaining: To be “ right” Part Conflict Resolution Training Program for K-12 Schools: Brief Outline: Conflict Resolution Training Program for K-12 Schools

I. Overview and Justification A.

School crime statistics B. Relation to time on task C.

Positive Outcomes II. Activities to increase awareness of other’s perspectives

A. A Real American Exercise B. The Cultural Literacy Test C. Privileged Moves

Exercise III. Brief explanation of Conflict Resolution Models A.

General 1 . Separate people from the problem 2. Focus on interests, not positions 3. Invent options for mutual gain 4. Insist on using objective criteria 5. Frame conflict as a natural resource B.

Interests, Rights, and Power Model 1 . Overview of Interests, Rights, and Power Model a.

Default to using interest-based processes first b. Using Lowest-cost Rights or Power Process c. Loop back to interests ‘ V.

Putting the steps in place A. Practicing the methods learned above 1. Role playing during training . Fieldwork a. Apply methods learned in training b. Reflect on methods used B.

Train next group of stakeholders Annotated explanation of outline: Brief overview of and Justification for conflict resolution training program: Reports of school violence are no longer limited to an occasional fist fight.

We have had increasing incidences of violent incidents in recent years, as well as an increase in the number of incidents classified as “ bullying. ”

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Perhaps it is the prevalence of violence and/or bullying that causes many K-12 students to feel at risk of becoming victims. This fits with the knowledge that as stress increase, the untrained espouse is often to be on the defensive (Crews, Crews, & Turner, 2008, p. 25).

In addition to actual physical altercations, much classroom time is diverted from academic subjects (off-task) when students get into verbal altercations during class.

Students' lack of ability to focus on their class-work is also affected by mental and physical repercussions of previous or anticipated conflict in or out of the classroom. While there are no quick and easy answers, there is some evidence that conflict resolution programs in schools have resulted in lower violence rates at those schools. Current evidence indicates that untrained students by and large use conflict strategies that create destructive outcomes after training, students tend to use strategies learned in conflict resolution and peer mediation training to create peaceful outcomes (Monsoon & Johnson 1996, p. 59). Many different conflict resolution programs are available to individual teachers, schools, and school systems and this is important because different school environments will likely need conflict resolution interventions especially suited for their particular school culture and environment.

The greatest impact on lowering rates of school violence and resoundingly increasing not only quality of life but educational performance as well is achieved when entire schools and school systems implement conflict resolution plans.

The first step in implementing a conflict resolution plan is first, to choose a program and the second step is to train everyone connected with the school. Often administrators are trained first, then teachers and other instructional personnel, then non-instructional personnel, then the students. Later parents and community members are trained as well. It must be understood by all that fully implementing a conflict resolution program takes time and reinforcement.

Although it is not included in all available conflict resolution training programs, a good first step is to increase awareness of the fact that that socio-economic stratification in our society causes those in different socio-economic classes to experience life differently than those in other socio-economic classes.

This is extended to stratification of our Multicultural Education as Social Activism, Christine Shelter reminds us that, “ We must use schooling as much as possible to help shape a future that is more equal, democratic, Just, and that does not demand conformity to one cultural norm. 1996, p. 15).

Proposed Conflict Resolution Program for all Public School Stakeholders
Program Overview: The Interests, Rights, and Power model of conflict resolution will be presented briefly; however, emphasis will be on understanding how to apply specific steps in the intervention process in order to mitigate and De-escalate conflicts in the school setting. An initial step in securing shared goals of minimizing negative outcomes of conflict is to sensitizes people to the fact that others viewpoints, while they may be different from one’s own, are equally valid.

Exercises to increase wariness of other's perspectives: Exercises to increase this awareness, such as those that follow, may help achieve this goal.

ACTIVITY #1 – A REAL AMERICAN – An exercise in cultural relativism
Object of the exercise: To discuss relative strengths and weaknesses of individuals based on our interpretations of their identifying characteristics. How to play: (STANDARD: 30 – 45 minute version) Players are assigned to teams with equal amounts of participants on each, then are given a list of the following “players” and their descriptions.

The facilitator will then read the following team questions. Teams will have 2 minutes each to come up with an answer to answer each question.

All participants are to help decide on their team's answer to each question. Participants are encouraged to discuss each question as a group once all teams' answers have been given. If time permits, participants will answer the individual questions individually, then discuss their answer choices.

(QUICK: 5 minute version) Players act as individuals. Individual participants are given a list of the following “players” and their descriptions.

The facilitator will then read the individual questions.

Individuals will be given time to respond and to discuss if time permits.

Players: Bobby – A 50 year old, rural, white American farmer from Arkansas, who makes just enough money to scrape by, suffers from PTSD, finished 8th grade. Marcia – A 35 year old paraplegic African-American business executive with a Master's degree in marketing, making in excess of \$500,000 per year from Fresno, California. Kafka – A 40 year old Iranian-American

chemist and university professor from Boston, Massachusetts, who only socializes with LIGHT people, like himself.

Eunice – A 28 year old hearing-impaired, Native American mother of eight children, who attends chemical school and lives in inner-city Chicago, Illinois.

Team Questions: Which player would you choose to represent the “ typical” American? Which player would you choose to work an undercover mission in a maximum security prison? Which person would you choose to be your new neighbor? Which person would you choose as a representative to the United Nations? Individual Questions: Which player would you most like to be? Why?

B. Cultural Literacy Exercise ACTIVITY # 2 – THE CULTURAL LITERACY TEST:

1.

What is a Blue Tick? A – a tick found in the Blue Ridge Mountains B – a type of dog C – an alcoholic drink that is blue . What is Mother’s Day? A- a holiday in May B – the day the TAN checks arrive C – the day a woman gives birth to her first child 3. Which year is it right now? A – 2012 B – The Year of the Snake c – 2012-2013 4. What is a “ Nape”? A – a small nuclear warhead B – a fried grasshopper C – an elbow ANSWERS: 1.

B is correct- A Blue Tick is a type of dog. 2. If you’re a middle-class person with a decent income it’s A checks, you might choose B 3.

A is the correct calendar year B is the correct Chinese year C. Is the correct school year 4.

C is correct – Nape is another word for elbow If you need TAN Would you like to share your score? These are hard questions aren’t they? It is hard to

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choose the right answer, especially when you are unfamiliar with the context or culture from which the questions and answers were taken. This is loosely-based on an exercise called “ Privileged Moves” which was based on the writings of Patricia Hill-Collins.

PURPOSE: This game is designed to make you think about where you and your peers fit in compared to society as a whole.. One participant will need to be the reader; however this person may play the game, s well.

Each player will need a ruler and a penny. Each player lays their ruler down sideways in front of them (on a desktop is fine). Then each player places their penny between 6 and 7 on the inch side of the ruler. The reader then reads the following statements one at a time. As the reader reads the commands, each player moves his or her penny down one inch (towards zero – for YES) or up one inch (towards twelve – for NO).

At the end of the game, the reader is to ask all players to say whether they find themselves in an extreme category (between 1 and 4 OR between 9 and 12 – do not distinguish between these two extremes) OR in the middle (between 5 and 8) Discussion should follow. STATEMENTS: 1 – Have you ever had to choose whether to spend the rest of the money you had, to buy either diapers or formula/baby food? 2 – Do you go out to a nice restaurant twice a year or less? (more than twice a year is a “ no’) 3 – Have you ever had to put something back at the grocery store because you did not have enough money to pay for it? – Have you ever gotten a tax refund, as a result of filing your income tax return? 5 – Have you ever worn hand-me-down clothes? 6 – Do you use something other than a personal automobile for transportation? –

Have you ever been the only one of your race/ethnicity in a public gathering place? 8 – Would it make a great difference in your family living situation for you to miss a paycheck? This model is chosen because it classifies all dispute resolution approaches as interest-based, rights-based or power-based, and is a straightforward prescriptive approach that can be taught/reinforced by a mediator during negotiation.

The primary focus will be upon the interest-based processes as these are the only guaranteed win-win situations which take into account each parties' wants, needs, hopes, and fears.