

Students Learn the Art of Win-Win Negotiation

Sadie and Sophie, fourteen-year-old twins in South Central Los Angeles, lived in a car with their mother, a drug addict. Sometimes they stayed with relatives or in rundown motels. When they made it to school, they took part in the Program for Young Negotiators (PYN). Using their new negotiating skills, and with the support of PYN staff, the twins presented a plan to exchange work for rent to apartment managers throughout the area. Within two months, they achieved their goal, and moved with their mother into a new home.

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PYN began operations just over four years ago in a single Boston classroom. Today, it is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization with programs in 25 school districts and numerous youth organizations across the country and Canada. The U.S. Departments of Justice and of Education recently

recognized PYN as one of the nation's leading programs for conflict resolution education.

Based on the theories and teaching practices of the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, PYN helps students learn how to achieve their goals through artful negotiation. Using simulations, discussions, video presentations, and reflection, PYN students learn to uncover the underlying causes of a conflict and to develop win-win solutions. PYN students come to understand that the most effective means of getting what they want is by working in collaboration with others — violence may be an option, but it's not a smart decision. According to PYN's Executive Director, Bruce Richman, "students respect the Program because it addresses the real issues they face. It provides them with practical tools they can apply immediately to life."

Jerome Kagan, Chair of the PYN Board and Co-Leader of Children's Studies' Interfaculty Seminar on Identity, remarks, "The PYN curriculum has the promise of strengthening the adolescent's ability to think critically about social relationships, to consider the perspectives of others, and to interact more confidently with peers and adults."

PYN's evaluation results have been promising. Mike Nakkula, a prevention oriented psychologist and Assistant Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, has been leading an evaluation of the project for the past three years. "Every year the program grows cumulatively in its strength," says Nakkula. "Although preliminary, the findings suggest that PYN has an important effect on the behavior of its participants. There is a great deal of converging data that suggests that PYN graduates are more likely to talk their way through problems, and less likely to engage in aggressive conflicts."

While many mediation programs train only select peer mediators, PYN trains all students in negotiation to prevent conflicts from escalating and involves the whole school community through all-staff trainings and parent and community workshops. PYN distinguishes itself in the field of conflict resolution through its proactive and positive youth development approach. According to Richman, "We focus on the strengths of young people, providing positive direction and meaningful avenues for growth. Students who participate in Young Negotiators become part of a growing movement of young people, gaining a positive identity at a critical time in their development."

Currently, PYN is working in partnership with Boston Public School administrators to develop a casebook integrating negotiation into the teaching of U.S. history and addressing Boston's academic standards. Also in development is a guide for parents and an advanced negotiation curriculum involving diversity-based conflict.

Participating schools in Boston, Los Angeles, and New York have confirmed changes in student behavior. "Our students, who live in areas where violence is a way of life, are internalizing the non-violence principles and negotiating skills," says Peggy Doherty, District Administrator for Hawthorne Public Schools in South Central Los Angeles. "Negotiation is now a realistic life choice."

For more information, please contact PYN at 888-TEACH-PYN or (617) 225-7877.

This article is the first in a series showcasing programs that support the learning and well-being of children in the Boston area. If you'd like to suggest such a program to be featured in a future issue of *Kaleidoscope*, please call (617) 496-6883 or e-mail hpssc@harvard.edu.

