



# HARVARD

MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1998 • \$4.95

## Passionate Negotiator

IN HIS FIRST YEAR at Harvard, Jared Curhan '93 enrolled in a freshman seminar taught by Professor Howard Raiffa, a specialist in decision analysis. He was instantly absorbed. "This was a class I could actually use when I went back to the dorm," he says. Today, he is founder, board member, and former president of the Program for Young Negotiators Inc. (PYN).

When Curhan told Raiffa he wanted to learn more about decision-making, Raiffa invited him to be his teaching assistant in a Business School course on negotiation, which, Curhan explains, is simply decision-making on a group—rather than individual—scale. With help from Raiffa and Professor Jerome Kagan, he then developed his own special concentration, negotiation and decision-making, within the psychology department. Curhan chose the development of negotiation skills in children as his thesis topic: he studied a group of public elementary and middle-school students in Cambridge, and used roleplaying to measure their levels of negotiation ability. And he discovered that the roleplaying activities were not only fun for the children, they were actually teaching them how to become better negotiators. "I thought, I've got to do something about this!" he says. "I started doing workshops at schools, and looking around to see what kids were being taught already. I found that most schools were teaching mediation—*intervention* by a trained, impartial third party to solve conflict. Negotiation is *prevention*. That was the impetus for starting PYN. The goal is to teach kids how to get what they want without violence."

PYN began in 1993 as a small group of volunteers, most of them from the Graduate School of Education and the Kennedy School. The first course, funded by Keane Inc., a software services firm, was conducted in Charlestown, and Curhan invited Boston newspapers and television stations to the graduation ceremony. The resulting publicity generated calls from both interested schools and potential corporate sponsors.

PYN has come a long way since then. In addition to its Cambridge office, the organization has branches in New York, Los Angeles, and Toronto. Its program, based on the Harvard Negotiation Project model developed at the Law School, is a three-step process of training teachers, providing them with the 10-week curriculum, and fostering participation by parents and other community members. Originally, schools seeking to use the program needed to find corporate sponsors. Now, Curhan says, all schools pay for the program out of their own budgets.

Curhan is now pursuing a Ph.D. in psychology at Stanford, with a focus on negotiation, and setting up another PYN office in northern California. Houghton Mifflin has published his *Young Negotiators*, PYN's curriculum for teachers, and he is completing a self-help book on negotiation strategies for elementary-school students that he is writing with classmate Deborah Katzenellenbogen. "In my opinion," he says, "negotiation is one of the most critical skills for adults. My hope is that these skills will soon be recognized as even more critical in the lives of children." ~MARCINE PERRY

For more information, call 888-TEACH-PYN or visit the PYN website, "<http://www.pyn.org>".



KAREN ROBINSON

Jared Curhan and students at Crittenden Middle School, in Mountain View, California, play the Arm Game, one portion of the Young Negotiators curriculum package.