Benefits and Key Components of

Peer Mediation Programs

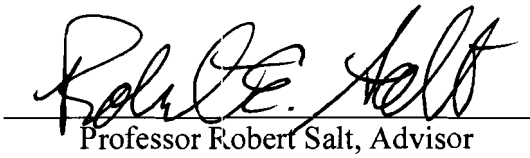
By

Cynthia O. Thomas

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
In

Education

Approved: 2 Semester Credits



Professor Robert Salt, Advisor

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin – Stout

January, 2008

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, Wisconsin

Author:	**Thomas, Cynthia O.**
Title:	***Benefits and Key Components of Peer Mediation Programs***
Graduate Degree:	**MS Education**
Research Adviser:	**Dr. Robert Salt, PhD**
Month/Year:	**December, 2007**
Number of Pages:	**36**
Style Manual Used:	**American Psychological Association, 5th edition**

ABSTRACT

Peer mediation has repeatedly proven itself by reducing violence in schools. Teachers and administrators experience up to a 97% reduction in disciplinary incidences as students take responsibility for their own conflicts and arrive at agreements the majority of which are upheld months later. While self esteem and overall school climate are raised, young people gain skill sets in communication and conflict resolution that they apply with siblings and friends and that may give them an advantage in their future employment efforts. Educators are able to apply themselves to teaching and students show marked academic improvement

Key components to peer mediation programs are examined in the literature. The whole school approach, in which all adults and students are trained in conflict resolution

skills, is recommended over the cadre approach involving only a small group of trained peer mediators. Teaching about conflict is able to be incorporated into all subjects and is recommended schoolwide. Student mediators often work in pairs and need proper support during school and in regular meetings for further education and discussion. Adult program leadership is optimally structured in a collaborative effort between a coordinator and a conflict resolution team or committee.

Efforts extended by administrators, teachers, counselors and other adult professionals to support a peer mediation program can be considered time well-spent if seen as replacing the time and effort formerly expended arbitrating student conflicts.

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin - Stout

Menomonie, Wisconsin

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my Program Director, Dr. Amy Gillett, for her invaluable teaching of research, writing and statistics. I have also appreciated her clear support of my efforts to complete a thesis on a topic deeply meaningful to me. I wish to thank my Advisor, Dr. Bob Salt, for his oversight of my final writing. For his interest in my topic and confidence in me, I am especially appreciative. Special thanks are due to Dr. Jill Klefstad for the attention, interest and rigor she brought to this project. Acknowledgement is also due to Dr. Terri Karis for her useful insights. Finally, I am so thankful for the most generous support of my family and friends.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

.....Page

ABSTRACT..... ii

Chapter I: Introduction..... 1
Statement of the Problem..... 4
Purpose of the Project..... 4
Assumptions..... 5
Definition of Terms..... 5
Limitations.....6
Methodology..... 6

Chapter II: Literature Review..... 7
Introduction..... 7
Whole School Approach..... 7
Classroom Curriculum..... 16
Mediator Support..... 22
Program Leadership.....25

Chapter III: Summary..... 29
Summary.....29
Discussion.....29
Recommendations.....31
Conclusions.....33

References.....34

Chapter I: Introduction

One of the most alarming issues in education today revolves around the growing presence of conflict in our schools. Peer mediation has been shown to reduce the number of conflict incidences (Bell, Coleman, Anderson, Whelan & Wilder, 2000; Hart & Gunty, 1997; Johnson, Johnson, Dudley & Magneson, 1996). Lower incidences of conflict have been seen to result in less truancy and fewer retributive disciplinary actions (Smith, Daunic & Miller, 2002; Ohio Commission, 1994). In a statistically significant study of over 8,000 students, 500 teachers and 60 junior and senior high schools, conflict referrals to teachers were seen to drop by 80% and referrals to principals were reduced to zero when peer mediation was in place (Johnson, Johnson, & Dudley, 1992).

While much peer mediation research is based in urban schools, studies of rural schools have also shown reductions in discipline referrals, in-class fighting, and nurse treatments for fighting (Smith, Daunic & Miller, 2002; Bell et al., 2000). In one state, the School Health Education Profile Report stated that "almost all schools had written violence-response plans, but more schools needed to offer peer mediation, gang violence, and bullying prevention programs" (University of Wisconsin- Madison, Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction, 2002).

Peer mediation programs also result in significant improvement in the overall school climate (Bell et al., 2000; Johnson et al., 1996; Lane, McWhirter, & Jeffries, 1992). Conflicts resolved through peer mediation show a 90 - 100% rate of success three or more months after the sessions occurred (Cantrell, Parks-Savage & Rehfuss, 2007; Smith, Daunic & Miller, 2002). Mediators showed the ability to retain and integrate mediation skill training through testing three to twelve months after training and through

use of the skills in their schools, families and neighborhoods (Bell et al., 2000; Bickmore, 2000; Cremin, 2000; Humphries, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 2005; Johnson et al., 1996). One school experienced a reduction in conflict incidences steadily over a two year period after which time violent occurrences evened out at a far lower average (Pastorino, 1997). One study states "the culture was enlarged by students taking responsibility for themselves" (Lindsay, 1988). Peer mediation contributes to an improved school environment because students also develop better attitudes and increased self-esteem (Lane, McWhirter, & Jeffries, 1992; Bickmore, 2000).

In schools with peer mediation, students attain higher academic performance (Johnson et al., 1996) "especially those with marginal academic grades" (Araki, Takeshita & Kadomoto; 1989). Administrators and teachers spend less time assisting students with conflicts and more time educating (Hart & Gunty, 1997; Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1992). The National Commission on Excellence in Education in their 1983 publication, A Nation at Risk, stated that listening skills, problem solving, oral language expression, and critical thinking were all needed for academic excellence (Goldberg & Harvey, 1983).

Communication and social skill development is another benefit of peer mediation programs. According to Elenie Opffer, a mediator, consultant and trainer for the San Francisco Community Board of Mediation Program, peer "mediators learn the following concepts and skills:

a) the dynamics of conflict and how to manage it constructively

b) problem solving steps

c) effective listening and speaking skills for developing interpersonal understanding

d) and how to work cooperatively" (Opffer, 1997).

Such skills may also be crucial for future employment retention. A 1999 Goodrich & Sherwood poll of middle- and upper-level managers documented that 272 out of 300 firms in the United States let employees go due to lack of sufficient and effective social and communication skills.

Some peer mediation programs have made a focused effort to train children who are considered to be bullies or otherwise have behavior challenges (Cremin, 2002; Smith, Daunic & Miller; 2002). In one study, it was discovered that previously disruptive students became some of the most effective mediators and that peer mediation resulted in positive behavior after only one year (Bickmore, 2000; Lundstrom, 1999). Likewise, children with behavioral disorders and autism have been observed to experience a number of benefits from participation in peer mediation (Kamps, D., Royer, J., Dugan, E., Kravits, T., Gonzalez-Lopez, A., Garcia, J., Carnazzo, K., Morrison, L. & Kane, L.G., 2002; Mathur & Rutherford, 1991).

Beyond reducing incidences of conflict in schools, peer mediation programs in elementary and secondary schools offer a number of benefits to students and educators, including an improvement in school climate and academic performance, and the development of communication and social skills.

Statement of the Problem

First implemented in the United States in the early 1960's as a response to student unrest in schools, by 1996, conflict resolution programs numbered approximately 5,000 across the United States (Oppfer, 1997). Over the last decade due to budget reductions and time constraints, peer mediation programs declined in number. Violence in schools increased however and peer mediation programs are once again being considered. For example, Virginia and California now have statewide conflict resolution programs offering peer mediation and, in 2006, the State of Wisconsin recommended that each school in the state offer peer mediation and anti-bullying programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine peer mediation program research to identify and analyze key components which contribute to a peer mediation program's success and sustainability. This will be accomplished through a review of the literature. This study of the research on peer mediation intends to inform educators, parents and community members regarding the benefits of peer mediation and the key components needed for sustaining successful peer mediation programs.

The objectives of this study are to identify and analyze key components contributing to the success and sustainability of peer mediation programs. Components reviewed include program approach (whole school versus cadre), classroom curriculum, mediator support, and adult program leadership.

Assumptions

In this study, it is assumed that young people attending elementary and secondary school find themselves in conflicts with each other which they have difficulty resolving or are unable to resolve. Secondly, this study assumes elementary and secondary school educators are interested in information regarding the management of student conflict.

Definitions

Conflict resolution is the changing of a disagreement, or conflict, into a state of agreement, or at least into a state that is no longer in disagreement. However, nothing can be defined about the manner of arriving at the changed state. Many contend that conflict resolution defies definition.

Negotiation is a process of conflict resolution that includes discussion between disputants. The discussion is intended to reach a mutual agreement.

Mediation is another avenue of conflict resolution which works through discussion between disputants but also includes a neutral third party mediator.

Peer mediation is a restorative manner of conflict resolution between persons where a neutral third party from one's peer group attends the persons in conflict while the persons in conflict negotiate a mutual agreement.

Negotiation and mediation are both non-hierarchical conflict resolution approaches conducted between the parties themselves without outside authority. Furthermore, both methods tend to operate in two stages. In the first stage, an agreement to participate in negotiation or mediation serves to deescalate conflict tension. In the

second stage, the process of defining a mutual agreement requires addressing the root of the conflict (to redefine the issue) in a mutually agreeable manner.

Retributive is defined as "paying back," whether in reward or punishment. It is based on the notion that a person deserves reward or punishment based on their behavior of merit or their behavior without merit.

Restorative is defined as "bringing back" to "original form" or condition. Negotiation and mediation are based on a restorative philosophy of conflict resolution because both methods must, of necessity, address the root of the conflict in order to arrive at a restored state of agreement.

Limitations

The existing body of research on peer mediation is beginning to attain some stature in size. It is surprising to discover that almost all the research touts positive findings which might suggest the need for more studies. Only two studies were found with either neutral or negative results (Fleischauer, 2000; Theberge & Karan, 2004). Some of the research is lacking in standard research methods, such as control groups, and pre- and post-testing procedures. Finally, only some of the components of peer mediation programs will be addressed in this literature review.

Methodology

The literature will be reviewed to identify and analyze program approach, classroom curriculum, mediator support, and adult program leadership components of peer mediation programs.

Chapter II: Literature Review

With an escalation in violent acts by students and increases in incidences of conflict in educational settings (Leighfield & Trube, 2005), schools, school districts and entire states are choosing to implement peer mediation programs. A core of research findings exists on peer mediation programs and is the foundation of the following literary review. The purpose of the review is to identify key components of peer mediation programs' success and sustainability. Repeated themes emerging from the literature include a whole school approach, classroom curriculum, mediator support, and coordinator and team leadership.

Whole School Approach

The whole school versus cadre approach to peer mediation programs in schools is examined. Components of a successful whole school approach to conflict resolution focusing on negotiation and peer mediation skills are identified and include 1) educator - administrator, counselor, teacher and other staff - participation, 2) student participation and 3) other community member participation.

Whole School Approach - Educators

The most common advent of peer mediation programs in schools has been instigated by individual teachers or counselors. These programs are considered to be a cadre approach versus a whole school approach to peer mediation, and while successful in their own realm, they often have not garnered support from other teachers or from administrators. Benefits of the cadre approach programs are rarely documented and

difficult to generalize due to the small scale of the programs. In the last decade, many of these smaller programs have not survived budget reductions and increased pressure on teachers to document student performance through testing. Peer mediation programs lacking broad school support have not been easily sustained.

Researchers, notably David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson of the Educational Psychology Department of the University of Minnesota, taking note of the substantial and multi-faceted benefits of peer mediation in schools, focused their research to identify why programs were closing. The number one reason was the need for acceptance and support from the whole school community including the administrators, teachers, staff, students and parents. Research recommendations began to favor a whole school approach versus an individual classroom or cadre approach to peer mediation programs (Johnson et al., 1996; Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1992; Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Opffer, 1997; Shepard, 1994).

The use of a whole school approach for successful peer mediation programs is now a recurrent theme in the literature (Casella, 2002; Coleman & Fisher-Yoshida, 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 2005; Cremin, 2002; Smith, Daunic & Miller, 2002; Selfridge, 2004). In schools choosing the whole school approach, administrators, teachers, staff, students and parents are taught basic conflict resolution skills. Everyone learns the steps of negotiation and mediation and participates in role playing negotiation and mediation sessions (Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1992; Johnson et al., 1996). Peter Coleman and Beth Fisher-Yoshida at the International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University stress the need for all adults in the school community to be trained including counselors, librarians, secretaries,

paraeducators, coaches, bus drivers, cooks, custodians, and volunteers. Because this can appear to be an ungainly task, Coleman and Fisher-Yoshida recommend training in-house staff who then train others. The authors emphasize the importance of the whole school approach for its potential to offer young people "a caring school environment that provides daily experiences, as well as a model of cooperative relations, constructive resolution of conflicts, and social justice" (Coleman, Fisher-Yoshida; 2004).

For program success, it is crucial for administrators to participate and support peer mediation by 1) understanding the philosophy of negotiation and mediation 2) developing and using the skills themselves for resolving conflicts among the adult members of the school community 3) encouraging the incorporation of negotiation and mediation principles in classroom curriculum and 4) referring students in conflict to mediation.

As leaders in a school community and often the ultimate disciplinarians, the first challenge for administrators is to understand and embrace the change in disciplinary or conflict resolution philosophy from retributive to restorative and from hierarchical to peer. Negotiation and mediation are both non-hierarchical conflict resolution approaches conducted between the parties themselves without outside authority. Both methods tend to operate in two stages. In the first stage, an agreement to participate in negotiation or mediation serves to deescalate conflict tension. In the second stage, the process of defining a mutual agreement requires addressing the root of the conflict in a mutually agreeable manner.

As the disputants each state their perspective of a conflict then listen to the other person's perspective, the root of the disagreement is illuminated giving rise to a potential

reframing of the issues to an acceptable orientation for both parties. Because peer mediation 'goes to the heart' of a conflict, arguments are usually "solved" and do not arise again. Problems tend to be resolved rather than repeated. Furthermore, relationships that were once hostile and estranged sometimes turn into productive classroom project partnerships and friendships (Johnson et al., 1996; Lindsay, 1988).

Hilary Cremin, a mediation trainer for schools in the United Kingdom, states, "Peer mediation needs to be founded on genuine empowerment of young people, and a belief that disputants really are best equipped to resolve their own conflicts" (Cremin, 2002). Support for this stance comes from Piaget, who took children seriously and Vygotsky, whose insight showed us that children learn in social contexts. Current cognitive psychology research confirms Vygotsky's discovery by giving evidence of children's highest cognitive integration experiences occurring in small peer groups. In one of education's newest approaches, Reggio Emilia places an emphasis on learning through participation (New, 2007).

Because student conflicts have traditionally been addressed by administrators, principals and assistants are in prime positions to refer students to peer mediation, thereby building the program, assisting the transition to mediation and restorative versus retributive conflict resolution (Lindsay, 1988). In the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), one of the oldest violence prevention programs in the United States, the author states:

> "The level of success of the RCCP program in a school district is directly related to the level of commitment to the program that school administrators demonstrate to their staff... (Administrators) show their support for the program and the teachers by providing common planning and release time for teachers to share their expertise with one another." (Selfridge, 2004)

Principals and their assistants can relieve undue expectations of teachers by marshalling the whole school approach to conflict resolution (Lindsay, 1988). Other authors agree and further state that administrators have a unique opportunity to model the use of mediation skills themselves and to foster the use of mediation for the resolution of teacher and staff conflicts (Bell, et al., 2000; Carruthers, Sweeney, Kmitta & Harris, 1996; Stevahn, Munger & Kealy, 2005).

Teachers can play a central role in the integration of peer mediation into the school community by 1) learning negotiation and mediation skills 2) using the skills to resolve conflicts amongst the adult members of the school community 3) including conflict resolution in classroom curriculum and 4) referring students to peer mediation. Teachers have the potential to become educated in, to practice, and thereby to model the restorative conflict resolution methods of negotiation and mediation. Because current cognitive psychology research indicates that the highest integration of new concepts occurs in small social groups, teachers might find it most effective to utilize negotiation and mediation tools in conflicts amongst themselves as well as with administrators and staff. Perhaps most importantly, teachers who engage in peer mediation will find themselves at a greater advantage when teaching conflict resolution skills in the classroom due to the invaluable knowledge and confidence arising from first-hand experience.

In a survey of all two- and four-year teacher education programs in the state of Ohio, 92% of the respondents indicated that it is important for preservice teachers to have knowledge, skills, and positive dispositions regarding conflict resolution (Leighfield & Trube, 2005). Furthermore, the professors and instructors of preservice teachers fully

support the broad school approach to conflict management. The qualitative portion of the survey asked the following question: "Do you think that conflict management is the sole responsibility of classroom teachers?" The response was a unanimous, "No." One instructor's comment was, "Absolutely not! Everyone in the building/school community needs to be prepared to participate" (Leighfield & Trube, 2005).

In the Birmingham school district in England, teachers involved in a whole school approach to peer mediation for five years commented that the program is "easier when embedded into the school practice" (Cremin, 2002). In contrast, in one junior high school, the sixth grade teacher was running an effective peer mediation program but there was no follow-through by the seventh- and eighth-grade teachers (Dillon, 2002) exemplifying the difficulty of the cadre approach.

School counselors are in a unique position to foster the whole school approach to peer mediation. With backgrounds in the social and cognitive development of children, counselors are particularly well-prepared to review and recommend a peer mediation program appropriate for the school. Counselors can also be instrumental in building the program by training students in negotiation and mediation skills, by referring students having conflicts to peer mediation, and by supporting students using negotiation and peer mediation for conflict resolution (Humphries, 1999). Counselors find the program is most effective when principals and teachers are also referring students to peer mediation. One school counselor found teacher acceptance of the peer mediation program to be necessary for the program's success (Lindsay, 1988).

One tool for adapting a whole school approach is to administer a needs assessment survey before implementing a program. The assessment results can serve in a

double capacity to choose which program best fits the school and to provide pre-program information for research (Selfridge, 2004).

One school using the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program offers a unique focus by training coaches of sports intensively in mediation techniques (Selfridge, 2004). This exemplifies the concept of collaboration of groups within the school community, relieving any one group of the full responsibility of sustaining the peer mediation program.

Whole School Approach - Students

Students' contribute to the success of the whole school approach to peer mediation when all students feel included in the program (Stevahn, Munger & Kealey (2005). In the whole school approach, following negotiation and mediation skill training for administrators and teachers, all students are trained in restorative conflict resolution principles, including negotiation and mediation skills. Typical topics include active listening, oral expression, and problem solving and a common training technique involves role playing. To contrast, in the cadre approach, only a small percentage of students will receive conflict resolution training of any type, or if all students receive general conflict resolution training, only a small group will go on to receive mediation training.

One study found that 17 out of 18 peer mediators spanning four grades in an elementary school program using the cadre approach to peer mediation experienced interpersonal relationship stress from their peer group because of their role as mediators (Humphries, 99). The students who were not trained as mediators were unsure of the mediator role and tended to view it in a typical hierarchical fashion, with resentment,

jealousy or hostility, causing the opposite of its intended result. If all students are not to be trained as mediators, it is critical that the entire student body at least receive conflict resolution and negotiation skill education. This should serve to situate the student peer mediator as an effective role model who can be observed and emulated, and relied upon in case of conflict (Humphries, 1999; Stevahn, 2005). Since much of the literature indicates that the mediation training itself promises positive benefits to its participants, all students could benefit from negotiation and mediation training (Coleman & Fisher-Yoshida, 2004; Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1992).

Students need opportunities to practice their negotiation and mediation skills (Cohen, 2007). The level of use of a program can be critical in student skill development as well as program effectiveness (Selfridge, 2004). This need is more likely to be met in a whole school approach to peer mediation where effort is made to offer all students opportunities to serve regularly as mediators (Opffer, 1997; Stevahn, Munger & Kealy, 1995). Over one school year, where a whole school approach was implemented, a statistically significant increase was found in the percentage of students who indicated they would use integrative negotiation skills to solve conflicts (Stevahn, Munger & Kealy, 1995).

Average and at-risk students alike should have the same opportunities for negotiation and mediation skill training (Lindsay, 1988). In the Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers (TSP) Program at the University of Minnesota Cooperative Learning Center, every student is taught negotiation and peer mediation skills. Mediators then rotate so that every student has the opportunity to serve as a mediator. In one study of a TSP Program administered over one school year with a control group, pre- and post-tests

of 227 second through fifth grade students, including students with learning disabilities, results showed 92% of the students were able to write down all the steps in negotiation and mediation and the other 8% missed only one step (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Both average and at risk students are able to retain information about the process of negotiation and mediation.

Whole School Approach – Other Community Members

Finally, a whole school approach can benefit from a wider concept of community. If the school is seen as "embedded" in the local community, parents, local government officials, police officers, and others can be introduced to peer mediation and offered training (Coleman & Fisher-Yoshida, 2004; Lane & McWhirter, 1992). School counselors can fulfill community outreach requirements by making peer mediation information and training available to the broader community surrounding a school (Lane & McWhirter, 1992). While it may not be considered the duty of the school to educate the community at large in negotiation and mediation techniques, it seems clear that young people benefit from adults around them modeling the principals of restorative conflict resolution.

Parents have requested negotiation and mediation skill training for themselves (Gentry & Benenson, 1992). The Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program offers a "Peace in the Family" workshop where parents and other family members receive the same conflict resolution training as the students (Selfridge, 2004).

Parents often request peer mediation training for the siblings of student peer mediators (Gentry & Benenson, 1992). Children who are experienced as peer mediators at school show integration of skills learned by using them outside the school

environment, at home with siblings and in the neighborhood with friends (Smith, Daunic & Miller, 2002). Parents have indicated that these children "use more productive communication in conflicts" and that noticeably fewer conflicts require parental intervention (Gentry & Benenson, 1992).

In one controlled study of 14 elementary, middle and high schools compared with three schools with no conflict resolution programs, teachers and other personnel were surveyed. Recommendations from this study suggested it would be best if mediation were implemented throughout the entire community including preschool, Headstart, parents, neighborhoods, and the entire citizenry (Lindsay, 1988).

Classroom curriculum

A second key component to successful peer mediation programs is the repeated call for regular classroom curriculum addressing conflict resolution philosophy and skills (Carruthers, et al., 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Johnson et al., 1996; Opffer, 1997; Smith, Daunic & Miller, 2002; Stevahn, 2004). As the whole school approach began to be implemented, the need for conflict resolution skills to be taught to the entire student body became more apparent. If students were to use peer mediation, they needed to be educated in its ideology and practice. Classroom curriculum helped students to develop vocabulary and concepts about conflict resolution and gave the message that conflict resolution skills were for everyone. Furthermore, negotiation and peer mediation education in classroom curriculum began to be seen for its potential to reduce multicultural bias (Opffer, 1997).

A plethora of curricular approaches are available to implement the whole school approach to conflict resolution training. Laurie Stevahn, in her journal article, "Integrating Conflict Resolution Training into the Curriculum" (2004), suggests curriculum-integrated conflict resolution training "using integrative negotiation and peer mediation procedures to resolve diverse conflicts found in subject matter." In the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, teachers are provided with age-appropriate curriculum manuals (Selfridge, 2004). In the Peace Education Program, students are taught a constructive controversy procedure that supports them to engage in discourse and to make difficult decisions (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Some schools offer the students quarter or semester classes in conflict resolution training (Cremin, 2002; Dillon, 2002). In successful peer mediation programs in Birmingham, England, elementary school students learn to talk about their feelings in Circle Time which prepares them to participate in a negotiation process (Cremin, 2002). School counselors offer classroom guidance curriculum activities familiarizing students with the concepts of restorative conflict resolution and the peer mediation service that is available to them (Lane & McWhirter, 1992).

Conflict Resolution Unlimited (CRU) provides a complete Student Mediation Training program for K-2, elementary or secondary programs. One rural elementary school implemented the program revising the training to include role playing. A study with pre- and post-testing and control groups reported 32 out of 34 successful mediations (Bell, et al., 2000).

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) is a research-based K-12 school program operating in more than 400 schools and 16 school districts in the United

States. Originally a result of the collaboration between the New York City Public Schools and Educators for Social Responsibility, RCCP is a whole school approach with the primary goal of assuring social and emotional skill development for young people. The program supports and strengthens student self-management and responsibility. All adults in the school community are trained in and practice conflict resolution skills. Through a needs resource and assessment process, Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR) work with administrators and district leaders to develop conflict resolution implementation plans. Data gathered helps to define individual school or district issues and provides pre-program information that can be used as a basis for research on the effectiveness of the program.

David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson at the University of Minnesota Cooperative Learning Center developed a peer mediation program called Teaching Students to be Peacemakers (TSP). It is an integrative or win-win approach to cooperative rather than competitive conflict resolution involving perspective reversal. The program provides a curriculum for a whole school approach to conflict resolution. The philosophy of the program is based on the assumption that students can "regulate their own behavior and resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively when:

(a) all the students in the school know how to negotiate integrative agreements to their conflicts and how to mediate schooolmates' conflicts
(b) all the students can use negotiation and mediation procedures effectively
(c) the norms, values, and culture of the school promote and support the use of negotiation and mediation procedures
(d) peer mediators are available to support and enhance students' efforts to negotiate and
(e) the responsibility for peer mediation is rotated throughout the student body, so

that each student has the opportunity to act as a mediator"
(Johnson et al., 1996).

Students in elementary school as young as second grade receive 10 – 20 hours of in-class training over several weeks. Students participating in this program showed a high rate of skill retention and creativity in resolving their own conflicts. The principal and six teachers who participated in the program unequivocally support TSM and agreed to receive future peer mediation training (Johnson et al., 1996).

According to Laurie Stevahn, Assistant Professor of Education and Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Seattle University, conflict resolution training and practice can be effectively integrated into various subject curricula. Research shows that participating students benefit in improved academic achievement and social skill development (Stevahn, 2004). Students can be taught basic negotiation and mediation skills in the classroom. They can then be encouraged to apply the skills to explore social, economic, political, historical and literary conflict found in regular subject curricula of all sorts. In order to accomplish this integration, the following steps are needed:

1. establish a cooperative classroom
2. define conflict and identify conflict in curricular material
3. practice conflict resolution by applying negotiation and mediation skills to conflicts found in curricular materials
4. evaluate the process each time it is used
5. apply negotiation and mediation skills to real life conflicts in classrooms and schools

The concept of teaching through conflict is in alignment with Piaget's social development theory where conflict is responsible for change. The contradictions inherent in conflict

serve to move a child to make internal adjustments and changes from their initial views (Buchs, Butera, Mugny & Darnon, 2004).

Two cooperative strategies that can be utilized are cooperative pair interviewing and cooperative mind mapping. In cooperative pair interviewing, students ask each other questions specifically designed to be meaningful, applicable to personal experience, thought-provoking, nonthreatening, and "relevant to the characters, events, themes, or concepts in the academic material to illuminate the subject matter" (Stevahn, 2004).

In cooperative mind mapping, students study a reading and from it create a list of relevant components. From the list, each pair of students designs a literal map of all the components chronologically around the central theme. Students experience interdependency with their classmates as they 'map' a base from which to explore the readings' conflicts.

In the process of defining and identifying conflict, teachers can assist students to observe how others respond to conflict. In this way, Stevahn feels students can see that certain ways of responding to conflicts such as forcing, withdrawing, smoothing and compromising are not conducive to long-term, realistic solutions for both parties involved in a conflict. Rather, students can see by example that cooperative problem solving facilitated by such methods as negotiation and mediation can result in win-win outcomes where everyone can "attain personal goals and maintain positive relationships when conflict occurs" (Stevahn, 2004).

Students are taught a six-step negotiation procedure from Johnson & Johnson's Teaching Students to be Peacemakers Program which they follow in role-playing conflicts from the classroom curriculum materials. They learn the difference between a

distributive, win-lose negotiation approach and an integrative, win-win method of resolving conflicts in a cooperative rather than competitive manner.

A reliable study indicates that adoption of a total-student-body, classroom-conflict-training program does not necessarily promise high levels of classroom implementation (Stevahn, Munger & Kealey, 2005). To boost this, recommendations suggested active collaboration with other teachers including a) teachers studying conflict resolution together through professional development opportunities b) finding curriculum resources to adapt to different grade levels c) exploration and testing of practical strategies in the classroom and d) sharing knowledge with other staff members in both formal and informal ways such as collaborating with others to learn practical ways of integrating conflict resolution training into various topical curricula (Stevahn, Munger & Kealy, 2005).

Participation in the oversight of the conflict resolution program contributed to teacher interest and ease with the program. In one school, a group of teachers formed a conflict resolution and safety committee. The highest levels of student conflict resolution training in the classroom occurred by the teachers on the committee followed by those teachers who worked most closely with the committee (Stevahn, Munger & Kealey, 2005).

A final example of classroom curriculum is the Peaceable Classroom approach. Conflict resolution principles are integrated into the curriculum and the daily classroom management. The Educators for Social Responsibility developed such a curriculum, Making Choices about Conflict, Security, and Peacemaking, which emphasizes caring and effective communication, cooperation, and diversity. Program participants suggest

the curriculum is instrumental in contributing to an overall improved classroom, as well as school, climate (U.S. Department of Education, *Teaching Conflict Resolution).*

Mediator Support

A third significant component to peer mediation programs in schools is to make allowance for mediator support (Cremin, 2002; Selfridge, 2004). Many schools support peer mediators as they would other student leadership programs, providing adult leadership, training, time and material resources (Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Selfridge, 2004).

Mediators benefit by meeting together weekly or biweekly for ongoing education, discussion and support (Cremin, 2002; Hart & Gunty, 1997; Lane, McWhirter & Jeffries 1992; Smith, Daunic & Miller, 2002). Schools may offer a regular time daily, or two to three times weekly, in homeroom, class or in the guidance office for students to conduct mediation sessions and for ongoing training about conflict resolution. In one school district, most mediation sessions are supported to take place during the lunch break. In another program, all mediation sessions take place in the guidance office and primary support comes from the guidance counselor. In other programs, home room teachers oversee mediation sessions and assist the mediators with 'debriefing.' In the latter design, mediation sessions are accommodated to occur any day school is in session.

In an urban school, mediation team meetings were held during school hours and parents were always welcome. In another urban school, weekly mediation team meetings yielded school policy recommendations, presentations for the parent organization, fundraising events, and a field trip to meet mediators at another school. The two school

mediation groups collaborated in a joint peace project with parents (Bickmore, 2001). Another school mediation team created a mediation conference event involving mediators from 15 schools (Cremin, 2002).

Mediators may not be well accepted by their peer group. In schools with the cadre approach, peers may hold a particularly negative image of the mediator role (Bickmore, 2001). Working in pairs tends to alleviate peer group bias against mediators who may be perceived as 'taking sides.' Mediator team meetings can provide solidarity and creative ideas. For example, fifth grade student mediators held a discussion about realistic problems they had with their peers and afterwards were better able to work cooperatively with the other children (Humphries, 1997). Inclusive negotiation and mediation skill training educating the entire student body is suggested to ease or alleviate misunderstandings about the role of peer mediators. Addressing the social implications of students' role as peer mediators is an important function of adult support through program structure such as regular meetings.

Peer mediation works across all physical and cultural boundaries. As such, it is a tool for promoting diversity. Student peer mediators often work in pairs (Gentry & Benenson, 1992; Hart & Gunty, 1997; Lane, McWhirter & Jeffries, 1992). Cultural, physical and gender diverse teams are seen to be stronger and more effective than homogenous teams (Bickmore, 2000). In one instance, hearing-impaired students were included in a peer mediation program. Although it was initially difficult for them to engage in the process, they participated by giving presentations about peer mediation. After using the technique to address their own conflict, the hearing-challenged students became fully active in the program (Bickmore, 2001). In an inner city school, student

mediators from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds are purposely paired by the coordinator.

Peer mediators may need discussions revolving around multicultural issues and approaches. These can be addressed properly in regular meetings with student mediators. Students who participate in mediation, whether as a disputant or a mediator, tend to become sensitive to multicultural issues (Bickmore, 2000).

Students are encouraged to see their work as peer mediators as a form of public service and to explore how they might improve their service (Bickmore, 2001; Cremin, 2002). For example, secondary school peer mediators regularly teach primary students about peer mediation. Older student mediators also give presentations about peer mediation to parent and community groups. When asked what the most significant result of the peer mediation program was, one educator indicated that the whole school program functioned to offer opportunities for young people to help other young people. This created a shift of focus that was productive for students and teachers alike (Dillon, 2002).

Mediator team meetings offer a variety of beneficial opportunities (Bickmore, 2001; Casella, 2000; Cremin, 2002; Opffer, 1997; Dillon, 2002; Smith, Daunic & Miller, 2002). New topics in conflict resolution are useful, encouraging topic development and discussion. Students may be encouraged to research and present topics of interest to them as well. In some instances, students have developed a regular publication about conflict resolution including articles about the process, examples of successful mediation stories when permissible by the participants, and historic incidents of conflict resolution. Students have also actively promoted the programs through mini-presentations, poster

campaigns and announcements. Such activities provide opportunities for other skill development that may be useful in future education and employment.

Efforts extended by administrators, teachers, counselors and other adult professionals to support peer mediators can be considered time well-spent if seen as replacing the time and effort formerly spent arbitrating student conflicts (Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1992).

Program Leadership

A key component of successful peer mediation programs is adult leadership. A coordinator offers 1) coordination of the peer mediation program within the school 2) training for adults and students in negotiation and mediation techniques 3) fostering of diversity and 4) outreach beyond the immediate school community.

Whether from within school staff or from outside the school community, the program coordinator provides ongoing training for student mediators, teachers and staff. The Peace Pal Program, based on social learning theory, recommends a single coordinator, preferably without full-time class duties, (Cantrell, Parks-Savage & Rehfuss, 2007; Cremin, 2002). There is evidence that effective management of a peer mediation program occurs with one outside professional who implements and assists to sustain a peer mediation program (Carruthers & Sweeney, 1996). The amount of time needed to focus on the program varies but could be expected to be five to ten hours per week, with more time allocated during training sessions.

During the first weeks or semesters, programs are often supported by outside professional trainers for ongoing, weekly or bi-weekly, interaction (Bell et al., 2000).

This oversight may be gradually replaced by the school's mediation coordinator and an advisory / support team, relying on the original trainers only occasionally (Lindsay, 1988; Pastorino, 1997; Stevahn, Munger & Kealey, 2005).

A primary responsibility of the coordinator and team are to provide training as well as new material and refresher workshops for school personnel (Lindsay, 1988). Another avenue of support may include the development of school web pages on peer mediation. Fostering diversity in both cadre and whole school approaches to peer mediation is a sensitive topic worthy of program leadership attention (Dillon, 2002).

Beyond training and new resources, the program coordinator offers crucial support to cadre approach peer mediators, in particular, as they grapple with their new roles amongst their peers. For students, maintaining friendships with their peers can sometimes be a challenge. Having the opportunity to discuss social challenges and develop strategies with their fellow peer mediators guided by adult oversight has proven to assist student mediators to integrate their role as peer mediators within their social peer group.

Some authors recommended a team leadership approach (Cremin, 2002; Hart & Gunty, 1997; Opffer, 1997). Teachers serving on a conflict resolution committee or team are instrumental in supplying curriculum and current news regarding conflict resolution. Team members serve as significant resources regarding the use of peer mediation among the adults in the school as well as the students. Teachers who collaborate and work with the coordinator and the oversight committee or team are noted to offer a higher level of conflict training to students in the classroom (Stevahn, Munger & Kealey, 2005). The combination of a coordinator and a team or teams for program support can be dynamic

(Coleman & Fisher-Yoshida, 2004; Lindsay, 1988; Selfridge, 2004). A team of school staff members may be supplemented with another team of community members such as local police, government officials, clergy, social workers, and business persons..

Program coordinators and committees or teams play an important function in evaluation of peer mediation programs. Possible tools to accommodate program evaluation include a two-dimensional decision-making model. This tool assists in deciding whether to conduct a process-oriented or outcome-oriented evaluation and whether to focus on a small group of individuals, a schoolwide population or entire district. Outcome evaluations accumulate data and may be used statistically. Process evaluations tend to accommodate for complex factors affecting a program and may be expected to produce qualitative results. After deciding the nature of the study and the population, other questions to consider are the audience for the study and the instrumentation to be used. Following these steps provides the needed base from which to conduct action research projects.

Reliable research is needed to add to the small, but growing base of research on this topic. Principles of action research are suggested as appropriate guidelines for this type of research. Small, manageable studies "that are within the limits of (educators') personal competencies, available time, and analytical resources, and that do not detract from their first mission – that of operating the programs" are recommended (Carruthers et al., 1996). Action research emphasizes gathering information about specific groups in order to apply the knowledge gained to better a program. Mediation programs benefit from self-evaluation and resulting adjustments to improve program functionality and

vitality. Both literary and action research projects are beneficial additions to the growing body of research about peer mediation in schools.

Key components of peer mediation programs in schools include using the whole school approach, providing conflict resolution training in the classroom, ensuring mediator support, and structured adult program leadership.

Summary

Peer mediation yields positive returns by a reduction of violence and an improved overall school climate. A high percentage of agreements resolved through peer mediation remain in tact. Significantly, students are seen to raise their academic scores as well as to improve in attitude and self-esteem. Students also show significant retention and integration of conflict resolution skills and have applied these skills outside the school setting; such skills may prove to be a competitive asset in employment.

Key components to sustaining effective peer mediation programs include the use of a whole school versus cadre approach involving all adults and students in the school community as well as members of the community at large. Implemented as a form of restorative versus retributive conflict resolution, peer mediation training begins with basic negotiation and mediation skill training for administrators, teachers, other staff, and finally students. Classroom curriculum addressing basic communication, social and conflict resolution skills is crucial for establishing and maintaining an inclusive environment conducive to effective peer mediation. Mediators and teachers need leadership support including ongoing education and opportunities for critical analysis. Finally, a common approach to sustainable leadership includes a peer mediation program coordinator and a team of interested parties from within the school and/or local community.

Discussion

In 2002, Dillon's thesis dissertation found predominant recommendation from the literature to implement the whole school approach, as has been found five years later in

this study. Dillon tested the practicability of the direction from the literature by interviewing five school counselors actively coordinating peer mediation programs each in their own schools. While the coordinators strongly supported school-wide teacher conflict resolution training, student training through classroom curricula and school discipline policies incorporative of peer mediation, the five counselors did not feel that teachers needed to practice peer mediation themselves or that all students needed to be trained as mediators. This approach puts a greater burden on the student mediators to defend themselves against ostracism and to "sell" the program, and both the teachers and counselors feel that the mediators themselves experienced most of the benefits of the program.

In some schools with the cadre approach, non-mediator students who initially reject peer mediation, accept the program when it is perceived as an alternative to getting in trouble with adults. Even if the pressure from peers is relieved, why not give all students the opportunity to share the benefits mediators are consistently seen to attain? A very simple method of facilitating the whole student body to be mediators is, after training including role playing, to rotate designated mediators so that all students have the opportunity to mediate regularly.

The five counselors interviewed in one study did not feel it was necessary for teachers to take mediation training and to use the training to resolve their own conflicts. However, teachers are then placed in the position of overseeing a program with which they are not familiar and teaching skills that they are not practicing. Above all, it seems regrettable that teachers might not have the opportunity to experience two outcome benefits of participation in peer mediation: 1) addressing the root of conflicts and thereby

not revisiting the same issue(s) repeatedly and 2) enjoying and making good use of the fruits of collaborative efforts resulting from successful conflict resolution.

Recommendations

Although peer mediation programs are seen to stand on their own, a comprehensive approach to conflict resolution, involving other possible components such as character education, anti-bullying and peace education programs, is considered wise. In the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), peer mediation is one component of a comprehensive approach to preventing violence and creating caring and peaceable communities (Selfridge, 2004).

While the whole school approach to peer mediation is generally seen to be most effective for all parties, the cadre approach also provides otherwise unavailable options for restorative conflict resolution in schools. For example, one fifth grade classroom teacher has conducted an effective peer mediation program called Tiger Talkers in his class for over twelve years. While this review maintained a goal of identifying the best-case scenario for functionality of peer mediation programs in schools and the systemic change possible thereof, all efforts toward viable conflict resolution training and practice are certainly to be honored and will undoubtedly prove useful.

Influence theory suggests that if organizational structures support cooperative problem-solving, individuals will more likely choose that option. Research confirms this theory regarding student use of peer mediation where available with the resultant reductions in conflict incidences requiring adult educator attention and retributive disciplinary measures. This is also seen to be most effective where available to all

students. It is recommended that adult educators create the structure needed to support adult educator use of peer mediation. Adult educators practicing peer mediation can model peer mediation use for young people and, most importantly, with supportive communication techniques such as peer mediation in place, can more dynamically pursue the development of collaborative resources so needed in our school communities.

After basic negotiation and mediation training, teachers are encouraged to include regular conflict resolution lessons in their curricula. While standard conflict resolution curricula are available, addressing conflicts found in literature, social studies, health and virtually all academic areas opens a wide playing field that affords teachers autonomy and variety in bringing conflict resolution concepts forward for all students.

Student mediators need a basic support structure in place in case support is needed to properly place their mediating experiences. However, far beyond such a practical structure is the potential for critical analysis resulting from regular study and discussion of conflict resolution theory and practice. While one coordinator is often identified to maintain such a format, it is highly recommended that teachers participate whenever possible in the process of developing critical thinking about conflict resolution, especially in mediation participants.

A team approach to adult program leadership is highly recommended. Teams can be formed representing various sectors of the school and community or one inclusive team can be created. Distribution of program responsibility and concentration of resources for program support are two of the benefits of a team component.

Many authors call for more research. Evaluation procedures are encouraged for critical analysis of programs and as a basis for action research. Small, manageable

studies are recommended illuminating program-specific or case study information as is relied upon by doctors in medical research. Such studies yield practical recommendations for useful improvements to existing programs.

Conclusion

Through peer mediation, young people are empowered to use their own creative resources to solve their relationship problems. The energy previously put into confrontational or avoidance behavior is rerouted into assertive communication resulting in practical solutions. Young people have direct experiences in public service and in setting their own relational policies. Through mediation experiences, with proper support, students can also develop critical thinking skills.

Lawyers Howard Gadlin and Susan Strum of the Columbia Law School suggest the following:

> "We demonstrate that, under certain circumstances, informal conflict resolution can produce systemic changes that adjudication cannot achieve, and can thus solve public problems and generate public values." (Gadlin & Strum, 2003)

One reason to seriously consider implementing peer mediation is the potential for societal change from the violent society we have become to a culture harvesting the potential of its relational challenges through assertive, constructive communication.

Coleman, P.T. & Fisher-Yoshida, B. (2004). Conflict resolution across the lifespan: The work of the ICCCR. *Theory into Practice, 43*(1), 31-38.

Cremin, H. (2002). Pupils resolving disputes: successful peer mediation schemes share their secrets. *Support for Learning, 17*(3) 138-143.

Cremin, H. (2000). An investigation into whether the 'Iceberg' system of peer mediation training, and peer mediation, reduce levels of bullying, raise self-esteem, and increase pupil empowerment amongst upper primary age children. *Thesis, University College, Northampton & Leicester University.*

Daunic, A. P., Smith, S.W., Robinson, T.R., Miller, M.D. & Landry, K.L. (2000). School-wide conflict resolution and peer mediation programs: Experiences in three middle schools. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 36*(2), 94-100. Retrieved October 8, 2005 from Academic Search Elite.

Dillon, M.(2002). Lessons from the field: Balancing comprehensiveness and feasibility in peer mediation programs. *A master's thesis, University of North Carolina.*

Fleischauer, M. A. (1994). Peer mediation program piloted in the fourth grade at black earth elementary school. *A master's thesis, University of Wisconsin- Stout.*

Gadlin, H. and Sturm, S. P. (2007). Conflict resolution and systemic change. *Journal of Dispute Resolution, 2007*(1), 1-12.

Gentry, D. B., Benenson, W. A.(1992).School-age peer mediators transfer knowledge and skills to home setting. *Mediation Quarterly, 10*(1), 101-109.

Goldberg, M. & Harvey, J.(1983). A nation at Risk: The report of the national commission on excellence in education. *Phi Delta Kappan, 65* (1), 14-18.

Hart, J. & Gunty, M.(1997).The impact of a peer mediation program on an elementary school environment. *Peace & Change, 22*(1), 76-92.

Humphries, T. L. (1999).Improving peer mediation programs: student experiences and suggestions. *Professional School Counseling, 3*(1), 13-21.

Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, R. T. (2005).Essential components of peace education. *Theory into Practice, 44*(4), 280-292.

Johnson, D. Johnson, R.T., Dudley, B., & Magnuson, D. (1996). Training elementary school students to manage conflict. *Journal of Group Psychotherapy, Psychodrama & Sociometry, 49*(1), 24-39.

Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, R. T. (1995). Reducing school violence through conflict resolution. Virginia: *Association for Curriculum and School Development.*

Johnson, D., Johnson R. & Dudley, B. (1992). Effects of peer mediation training on elementary school Students. *Mediation Quarterly, 10*(1), 803-817.

Kamps, D., Royer, J., Dugan, E., Kravits, T., Gonzalez-Lopez, A., Garcia, J., Carnazzo, K., Morrison, L. & Kane, L.G., (2002). Peer training to facilitate social interaction for elementary students with autism and their peers. *Exceptional Children,* 86(2), 173-187.

Lane, P., McWhirter, S. & Jeffries, J. (1992). A peer mediation model: conflict resolution for elementary and middle school children. *Elementary School Guidance and Counseling, 27*(1), 15-24.

Leighfield, K. & Trube, M. B. (2005). Teacher education programs in Ohio and conflict management: Do they walk the talk? *Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 22*(3).

Lindsay, P. (1988). Conflict resolution and peer mediation in public schools: What works? *Mediation Quarterly, 16*(1), 85-99.

Lundstrom, M. (1999). Character makes a comeback. *Instructor, 109*(3).

Mathur, S. & Rutherford, R.D. (1991, August). Pre-mediated interventions promoting social skills of children and youth with behavioral disorders. *Education & Treatment of Children, 14*(3) 227-242.

New, Rebecca S. (2007). Reggio Emilia as cultural activity theory in practice. *Theory Into Practice, 46*(1), 5-13.

Ohio's State-wide School Conflict Management Initiative (2004). Retrived online April, 2004 from http://disputeresolution.ohio.gov/pdfs/Ohio%20Case%20Education.pdf .

Opffer, E.(1997). Toward cultural transformation: comprehensive approaches to conflict resolution. *Theory Into Practice,* 36(1), 46-53.

Pastorino, R. (1997). A mediation approach designed by adolescent disputants. *Mediation Quarterly, 14*(3), 351-266.

Selfridge, J. (2004). The resolving conflict creatively program: how we know it works. *Theory Into Practice, 43*(1), 59-67.

Shepard, K. (1994). Stemming conflict through peer mediation. *School Admininstrator, 51*(4), 14-17.

Smith, S. W., Daunic, A. & Miller, D. M.(2002). Conflict resolution and peer mediation in middle schools: extending the process and outcome knowledge base. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 142*(5), 567-586.

Stevahn, L. (2004). Integrating conflict resolution training into the curriculum. *Theory Into Practice, 43*(1), 50-58.

Stevahn, L., Munger, L. & Kealey, K. (2005). Conflict resolution in a French immersion elementary school. *Journal of Educational Research, 99*(1), 3-18.

Theberge, S. & Karan, O. (2004) Six factors inhibiting the use of peer mediation in a junior high school. *Professional School Counseling, 7*(4), 283-291.

Wisconsin School Health Education Profile (2002). Retrived December 6, 2005 from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/83/5b.pdf .