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## Peer Mediators' Perceptions of the Mediation Process

### Akran Arabulucuların Arabuluculuk Sürecine İlişkin Algıları\*

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#### *Abstract*

The purpose of this research was to analyze high school peer mediator students' experiences related to mediation process through their perspectives. The study was conducted using semi-structured interview technique. A total of 45 mediator students were interviewed. Data were analyzed through content analysis. Results were presented both in the form of quantitative (frequency and percentage) analyses and actual student statements. Results of the study indicated that the mediation process was well embraced by the students and that the experience increased their self-esteem and self-confidence, developed their conflict resolution and empathetic skills, reduced student interpersonal conflicts and fights, and improved their relationships with their peers. Mediator students used the skills they developed outside the school context as well. It was also reported, however, that a number of disputing students disparaged and showed resistance to the process, thus making the mediator students feel helpless at times.

*Keywords:* Peer mediation, conflict resolution, school discipline

#### *Öz*

Bu araştırmanın amacı, arkadaşlarının anlaşmazlıklarında arabuluculuk yapan lise öğrencilerinin süreç ile ilgili deneyimlerini, onların bakış açısından incelemektir. Araştırma, nitel araştırma tekniklerinden yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniđi kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmada 45 arabulucu öğrenci ile çalışılmıştır. Toplanan nitel veriler içerik analizi yapılarak analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sonuçları hem nicel (frekans ve yüzde) hem de doğrudan öğrenci söylemlerine yer verilerek sunulmuştur. Araştırmanın sonucunda, akran arabuluculuk deneyiminin arabulucular tarafından benimsendiđi; sürecin arabulucu öğrencilerin özsaygılarını ve özgüvenlerini geliştirdiđi; anlaşmazlık çözüm, iletişim ve empati becerilerini geliştirdiđi; öğrencilerin anlaşmazlıklarını ve kavgalarını azalttıđı ve akran ilişkilerini geliştirdiđi saptanmıştır. Arabulucu öğrenciler, gelişen bu becerilerini okul dışına da taşıdıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Buna karşın, sınırlı da olsa çatışan öğrencilerin arabuluculuđa direnç gösterdikleri ve arabuluculuđu küçümsedikleri, dolayısıyla bazen arabulucuların çaresizlik hissetmelerine neden oldukları saptanmıştır.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Akran arabuluculuk, anlaşmazlık çözümü, okul disiplini

#### Introduction

In response to escalating school violence, peer mediation programs have been widely used to handle and prevent interpersonal conflicts and to promote lifelong social skills. Few professionals would agree that punitive, reactive measures to aggressive acts teach appropriate

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behaviors or that they are effective in the long term (Smith, Daunic, Miller, & Robinson, 2002). Traditional punitive and exclusionary measures are being replaced with conflict resolution and peer mediation programs. These programs attempt to transform how students conceptualize conflicts and enable students to engage in productive decision making themselves about issues and conflicts that affect their own lives, instead of having a decision imposed on them (Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Miller, & Landry, 2000; Maxwell, 1989).

Peer mediation is a structured process in which a neutral and unbiased third party (mediator) assists two or more disputants to negotiate a constructive and peaceful resolution to their interpersonal conflicts (Bickmore, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1996a; Johnson, Johnson, Dudley & Magnuson, 1995). Assistance is provided by trained peers (mediators) who facilitate resolution of conflicts brought to a neutral table (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991). During the training, mediator students are taught to be able to take the other students' perspectives, to communicate effectively, and to learn problem solving techniques (Messing, 1993).

Although training students as peer mediators has some positive outcomes for the general school population, those who gain the most from these conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are the peer mediators themselves (Van Slyck and Stem, 1991, cited in Humphries, 1999). Peer mediation reportedly improves self empowerment by enabling the students to make decisions about issues and conflicts that affect their own lives which fosters self-regulation, self-esteem, and self-discipline (Johnson & Johnson, 1997; Maxwell, 1989; Sweeney & Carruthers, 1996). Johnson and Johnson (1996a) call these skills central and significant hallmarks of cognitive and social development. They also claim that students who are trained to negotiate and mediate their own and their friends' interpersonal conflicts have a developmental advantage over their peers who are not (Johnson & Johnson, 1995c). Furthermore, peer mediation process also improves mediator students' self esteem and self respect (Maxwell, 1989; Messing, 1993; Thompson, 1996), and results in better leadership skills, increased status among peers, and academic improvement (Lane & McWhirter, 1992). Another positive outcome of peer mediation training is transfer of conflict management skills into other social settings such as family and neighborhood. This positive transfer also has significant potential to promote better citizenship by becoming proactive problem solvers and responsible citizens (Johnson & Johnson, 1996b; Moriarty & McDonald, 1991; Williamson, Warner, Sanders, & Knepper, 1999).

Various research studies on the effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs exist worldwide (Bell, Coleman, Anderson & Whelan, 2000; Cantrell, Parks-Savage & Rehfuss, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 1996a; Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Smith et. al., 2002). A cumulative result in these studies was that 90-100% of the conflicts brought to peer mediators resulted in agreements accepted by both parties. A meta-analysis of peer mediation studies by Burrell, Zirbell, and Allen (2003) revealed that, in twenty-three studies, of the 4327 mediations, 4028 ended in agreement (93%). Majority of the above studies report positive findings about the effects of peer mediation on students' interpersonal conflicts. A great majority of research studies deal with the overall effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs and the effectiveness of peer mediation process in actual conflicts. However, little attention was paid to explore the problems and concerns of peer mediators who attempt to facilitate the negotiation of disputants' conflicts (Humphries, 1999). Therefore, the current study deals with conflict resolution and peer mediation training and procedures from the mediators' perspectives. How peer mediation is perceived will be analyzed based on the mediator students' statements. Student statements will be analyzed to reveal how peer mediators felt when they became mediators, the negative and positive aspects of becoming a mediator, how becoming a mediator affected their relationships with their friends, changes they observed in their own behavior, and finally, the effects of conflict resolution and peer mediation training and implementation of peer mediation process in their schools.

## Method

### *Participants*

The study was conducted in a high school located in Izmir, Turkey which served students from low SES families, and which reported an increased number of conflicts and higher incidence of interpersonal violence among students and which was interested in such intervention programs. The "Conflict Resolution Peer Mediation" (CRPM) training program was administered to the first-year students by the researchers for two years. A total of 830 students from 28 classrooms received training. Following the training, 12 peer mediator students were selected from each classroom by their friends. The peer mediators selected by their friends served as mediators in teams of two, for two weeks each. Upon completion of their terms, mediator students were interviewed about their mediation process experience using semi-structured interview forms. Only the students who served as mediators and who mediated multiple conflicts were interviewed to ensure data collected reflected the reality. A total of 45 (24 females and 21 males) mediator students were interviewed.

### *Procedures*

The CRPM training program was developed based on current literature in the field, such as by Bodine, Crawford, and Schrupf (2002a), Bodine et al. (2002b), Cohen (1995), Girard and Koch (1996), Johnson and Johnson (1995a), Johnson and Johnson (1995b), Schrupf, Crawford, and Bodine (1997a), Schrupf, Crawford, and Bodine (1997b), Simpson (1998), and Teolis (1998). The 31-class-hour training program covered four basic skills; understanding the nature of interpersonal conflicts (eleven hours), communication skills (four hours), anger management skills (six hours), and interpersonal conflict resolution skills (ten hours).

The CRPM training program was presented to the students during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years. The training sessions were held in the school during school hours, and involved individual learning, whole-class teaching, and pair-work and group-work activities. Scenarios were provided and role-play activities were carried out frequently. By the end of the fall semester of 2007-2008 academic year, the training was completed and peer-mediation model was initiated and observed the following semester.

### *Assessment Procedures*

Semi-structured interview forms were used to collect data for the study. Interview questions on the form aimed to elicit how mediator students perceived their role as mediators and to discuss their experiences during mediation. Some of the open-ended questions asked in the interview included the following:

1. How did you feel when you became a mediator?
2. In your opinion, what are the positive aspects of being a mediator?
3. In your opinion, what are the negative aspects of being a mediator?
4. How was your relationship with your friends affected by your becoming a mediator?
5. What sort of changes in your behavior did you observe after you received conflict resolution and peer mediation training and became a mediator?
6. What impact did mediation training have on student conflicts?

Before the actual interviews were held, the interview form was used on five students to test whether the participants easily understood and responded to the questions. These interview questions were then revised and actual interviews were held. The students' responses were digitally recorded, so as not to disturb the natural flow of speech. Prior to recording, the participants were

informed of the recording process and their consent was obtained. The recordings were then transcribed into text.

#### *Analysis of Data*

Data collected through semi-structured interview were analyzed through content-analysis. Content-analysis was performed based on the model of Johnson, Johnson, Mitchell, Cotton, Harris, & Louison (1996). First, all responses to the questions on the semi-structured interview form were read to give an orientation to their contents. Second, the responses provided by 45 peer mediators were categorized. Third, related categories were combined into more general categories (happiness, excitement, elation, feeling different, helpfulness, self-esteem, self-confidence). Fourth, once the categories were determined, the rater reread each form and classified the responses into the appropriate categories. Student responses were coded into these categories by one of the researchers.

After data in each category were coded, frequency and percentage figures based on gender were computed. Excerpts from student statements for each category were also provided. Before the final coding intra-rater reliability was checked (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Responses were coded by the same researcher twice, one week apart. The results of both codings indicated 94.23% reliability.

### Results

Qualitative data collected in the study were analyzed through content analysis. The total of the frequency figures for some categories often exceeds the total number of participants (45) as some of the student statements contained elements that fit several categories.

Table 1 shows how students felt when they were selected by their friends to be mediators. Student statements for this question were grouped into seven main categories; happiness, excitement, elation, feeling different, helpfulness, self-esteem, and self-confidence.

Table 1.

*Mediator Students' Feelings When They Became Mediators*

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
Happiness	16	64	12	46	It makes you happy to be able to solve people's problems/ ...helping two people work out a problem made me happy/ I was, of course, happy to earn my friends' fondness, I was happy.
Excitement	1	4	1	4	I was excited/ It's very exciting
Elation	3	12	6	23	I was rejoiced to help two people make peace/ I was elated when they made me a mediator
Feeling Different	1	4	1	4	I felt different/ You feel, you know, different.
Helpfulness	-	-	1	4	I became more helpful
Self-esteem	2	8	2	8	I felt special/ I felt good, for helping them make peace/ During mediation, I mean, one feels like a hero/ I felt proud of myself, for helping my friends make peace
Self-confidence	2	8	3	12	I was more self-confident and I felt I was doing a very important thing/ I felt I was trusted among friends/ It's very fulfilling/ One feels very powerful
Total	25	100	26	100	

The prevalent feelings among student statements were happiness (females 64% and males 46%) and elation (females 12% and males 23%). Two emerging themes were seen in the student statements regarding the source of happiness and elation mediators felt. One of these was the feeling of goodwill arising from helping their friends resolve their conflicts. Mediator students particularly emphasized this theme; happiness and elation arising from the selfless effort and the resulting peace and harmony among their friends. This led the students to become more

“prosocial and responsible good citizens”. The other theme was the happiness and elation arising from being selected for this position, particularly by their peers. The feeling of satisfaction they got from being selected by their peers seems to have made them both happy and rejoiced. Similarly, two other feelings emphasized by the mediators were self-confidence (females 8% and males 12%) and self-esteem (females 8% and males 8%). Mediators stated that they were more self-confident and had more self-esteem as a result of being a mediator and being selected as a mediator.

When asked about the positive aspects of being a mediator, students provided interesting responses. As can be seen in Table 2, student statements related to this question can be grouped under six main categories; personal development, prevention and reduction of conflicts, helping people make peace, feeling good about oneself, socializing, and self-confidence.

Table 2.

*Positive Aspects of Being a Mediator According to Mediator Students*

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
Personal Development	18	67	13	57	<b>a) Conflict Resolution Skills:</b> Now I understand the reasons why people fight/ You learn not to fight, control your anger... I almost haven't fought at all since I started being a mediator/ Instead of fighting, I prefer talking/ I began to think I could come up with a better solution by communicating/ I've learnt to remain impartial
					<b>b) Empathetic Development:</b> I understand my friends' feelings better/ I began to empathize and make them empathize/ I've learnt to listen effectively
					<b>c) Changes in Perception and Perspective:</b> I used to be cynical, but that's changed, for one/ I began to look at things more positively, more objectively
Prevention and Reduction of Conflicts	2	7	3	13	I helped people ... make peace without fuss and fight, by talking/ After mediation, there was no violence, well, no fights, or anything
Helping people make peace	2	7	3	13	Helping the disputants make peace
Feeling good about oneself	1	4	1	4	When two people make peace I'm happy/ this makes me feel good
Socializing	2	7	1	4	It helped me get along with people better
Self-confidence	2	7	2	9	My self-confidence boosted a lot/ helping people make peace made me more trustworthy
Total	25	100	26	100	

In particular, the category of “personal development” (females 67% and males 57%) was the most common. Mediator students believed that being a mediator helped them with their personal development. Student statements indicated three themes; “conflict resolution skills”, “empathetic development”, and “changes in perception and perspectives”. Students highlighted that they were involved in fewer fights, were able to manage their anger better, and preferred to engage in dialog to solve their problems instead of fighting. The training they received and the mediation sessions they took part in significantly helped them with their transformation from destructive to constructive. Similarly, students also emphasized the improvement in their empathetic skills. One of the remarkable student statements related to this was “I began to empathize and make them empathize”. They stressed that they themselves empathized and made the disputants empathize, and furthermore, learned to become better listeners. It is evident that mediating their friends' real and actual conflicts improved their “empathy” and “perspective taking” skills. In addition to conflict resolution and empathy skills, students also pointed to a transformation in their attitude and behavior. They said that they now viewed and perceived

conflicts differently--a transformation, particularly, from negative toward positive. When student statements in "personal development" category are viewed holistically, it is possible to say that mediation seems to contribute to the improvement of personal skills, such as self-empowering, self-regulation, self-management, being proactive problem solvers, positive transfer of problem solving activities, perspective-taking, and empathy.

Two other categories emphasized by the mediators were "helping people make peace" (females 7% and males 13%), and "prevention and reduction of conflicts" (females 7% and males 13%). Mediator students emphasized that the most positive aspect of being a mediator was to be able to facilitate a constructive and peaceful resolutions for their friends' conflicts and, thus, leading to a decrease in fights and interpersonal conflicts in the school. Hence, it is possible to say that mediation also resulted in "reduction of discipline activities".

When the mediator students were asked about the negative aspects of being a mediator, they also provided interesting responses. As can be seen in Table 3, student statements related to this question can be grouped in six main categories; "none", "resistance to mediation", "feeling of helplessness", "humiliation", "missing classes", "negative personal development".

Table 3.

*Negative Aspects of Being a Mediator According to Mediator Students*

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
None	19	66	13	57	
Resistance to Mediation	3	10	3	13	When I tried to bring people in for mediation, sometimes they would react in a rude manner/ when we invite our friends for mediation, they don't come
Feeling of Helplessness	4	14	2	9	When I fail to mediate I'm bummed/ If I can't help them make peace, that's a negative aspect for me.
Humiliation	1	3	4	17	Those who don't know about it find it odd, and it feels as if they're teasing me and that makes me a little upset
Missing Classes	1	3	1	4	I just missed 1-2 lessons, shifted my lessons / We had to leave class
Negative Personal Development	1	3	-	-	I began to tease people too much.
Total	29	100	23	100	

A great majority of the students claimed that being a mediator had no negative aspects (females 66% and males 57%). A limited number of mediators, however, named "resistance to mediation" (females 10% and males 13%) as discouraging. Although it is an elective process, when mediator students invited conflicting students to mediation, some of them faced adverse reactions. At times, when mediator students were insistent in offering help, they received resistance from the conflicting students. This issue was raised by both female and male mediators. However, more female mediators stressed "sense of helplessness" (females 14% and males 9%) and more males stressed "humiliation" (females 3% and males 17%). The mediations which did not result in win-win were perceived as a problem by some of the mediators who believed that this was caused by their inadequacy. Some of the mediators thought that problems arose when disputants began mediation process before they calmed down. "Angry disputants insulting the mediators" was named as one such problem.

Table 4 presents the results of the analysis of student statements on the effects of being a mediator on mediator students' interpersonal relationships. Student statements were grouped under six categories; "negative effects", "none", "positive effects", "personal development", "fostering relationships", "wider impact".

Table 4.

*Effects of Mediation on Mediator Students' Interpersonal Relationships*

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
Negative effects	-	-	-	-	None
None	3	9	5	22	Not much has changed.
Positive effects	9	27	1	4	It had a positive effect/ My relationships are better.
Personal Development	4	12	6	26	I now prefer talking instead of hitting or fighting, it's much better/ I realized I could solve my own personal conflicts with my friends better now/ I was able to communicate better with them, I was able to express myself better.
Fostering Relationships	12	36	7	30	I used to be feisty but ever since I became a mediator I've been getting along with my friends a lot better/ My relationships got more, um, friendly/ My relationships got better.
Wider Impact	5	15	4	17	Since I stood before them as a role model, they followed my behavior, began to act like I did/ when they have a problem they come to me and ask me to mediate/ helping people make peace builds a good rapport.
Total	33	100	23	100	

None of the mediator students stated that being a mediator had any "negative impact" on their interpersonal relationships. This may be seen as evidence of the positive reception of mediation-- a student-based approach to conflict resolution, by the Turkish educational setting. Few students (females 9% and males 22%) claimed that mediation had no effect whatsoever on their interpersonal relationships. However, especially female students, (females 27% and males 4%) mentioned positive effects.

Students stated that after they became mediators, their friends' behavior had become more favorable and that they generally received positive reactions. Similar to this category, mediator students (females 36% and males 30%) also claimed that they observed that their relationships improved. They went on to say that understanding their friends better as a result of mediation training and helping their friends resolve their conflicts peacefully and constructively through mediation improved their friendships and helped build closer friendships. Following the mediation, especially when the process resulted in peaceful and constructive resolution, the students involved continued to come to mediator students with their problems on different occasions both for support and to confide in them.

Similarly, mediators also voiced messages related to their own personal development (females 12% and males 26%). The statements made by the mediator students clearly signal the positive and transformative effects of mediation. Based on these statements, we could conclude that mediation is a conflict resolution approach that results in positive change, improved relationships and transformation both in conflicting students and mediator students. These findings underline self empowering and peer socialization through mediation. These contributions of mediation to peer relationships can also be considered to serve as a tool and an opportunity for social and emotional development of students. This category is highly meaningful in that it includes noteworthy student statements related to the transformation students displayed. Student statements in this category clearly show the transformation students underwent, especially in areas of self management, problem solving, self regulation, personal sense of empowerment, and ability to resolve their own problems. All else aside, mediation seems to be an essential problem solving process that directly influences mediator students' development. The fact that these statements were made particularly by male students in a primarily low-SES high school, is, of course, also striking.

"Wider Impact" was also named as another positive effect of being a mediator (females 15% and males 17%). Student statements in this category especially pointed to the changes in



mediator students' lives. The mediator student statements in this category suggested emerging leadership qualities, being perceived as a role model and being regarded as a friend who would share their problems. The present category draws attention to "impact on students' daily lives" and "potential to promote better citizenship".

Student statements regarding the behavioral changes in the mediator students after being a mediator can be grouped under seven main categories; no change, better communication skills, better empathy skills, positive change in behavior, better problem solving skills, transfer of problem solving skills outside of school, and socialization (see Table 5).

Table 5.

*The Changes in the Behavior of Mediator Students after Being a Mediator*

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
No change	-	-	1	4	
Better Communication Skills	5	18	5	19	I think I'm a better listener/ I've become a better speaker...
Better Empathy Skills	3	11	-	-	I put myself in others' shoes/ I think of other people as much as I think of myself
Positive change in behavior	11	39	7	27	I mended my ways/ I've stopped fighting/ I've become more understanding/ somewhat matured
Better Problem Solving Skills	8	29	9	35	I got involved in conflicts less and less/ Instead of getting angry and fighting, I prefer talking
Transfer of problem solving skills outside of school	-	-	2	8	When there is a disagreement at home, I try to meet them half-way, I mean, I try to do win-win. I mean, it affected me outside of school as well
Socialization	1	4	2	8	I respected them, when I respected them, I received their respect as well/ It's like a profession now
Total	28	100	26	100	

Mediator students claimed to have no changes in their behavior after becoming a mediator with the exception of one male student. The prevalent change in the statements of both female and male students (female 39% and males 27%) was "positive change in behavior". As can be seen in Table 5, a variety of themes emerged when the student statements were analyzed through content analysis. Mediator students stated that they were now able to stay calmer in the face of adversity, were more positive, they overcame their prejudices and chose not to fight. These statements indicated improvements in students' self management, self regulation and self empowering skills.

A similar category of positive change was "better communication skills" stressed both by females and males (females 18% and males 19%). In this category, mediator students especially emphasized that their listening skills have improved. Parallel to communication skills, the fact that three female mediators pointed to the improvement in empathy and perspective taking skills is also meaningful. In addition to this, another category emphasized by the mediator students (females 29% and males 35%) was the category of "better problem solving". Statements in this category, as presented in Table 5, provide significant evidence of the change and development in, and transformation of mediator students, especially in the cognitive domain. For instance, the following statement is highly meaningful; "I understood what negotiation was". Parallel to this statement, students claimed that they did not get involved in conflicts as much and approached conflicts in a peaceful and constructive manner, rather than aggressively. These statements also provide evidence to the "self regulation and self empowerment" effects of mediation. In line with these statements, the fact that two male mediator students extended their "problem solving skills" outside the school and used them in domestic conflicts in their families is also meaningful.

Student statements related to the effects of conflict resolution and peer mediation program on the school can be grouped in five main categories; effects on student conflicts, effects on student fights, effects on student behavior, effects on students' conflict resolution skills, effects on school (see Table 6).

Table 6.

*Mediator Students' Views on the Effects of Conflict Resolution and Peer-mediation Program on the School*

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
Effects on Student Conflicts	6	18	3	11	The conflicts among students decreased a lot/ If the conflict rate among students was %90, it brought it down to %40
Effects on Student Fights	10	30	11	39	There aren't as many fights as before. Almost no fights at all/ there were many fights in the class before. Now when something like that happens, the mediator brings them in and helps them solve their conflict
Effects on Student Behavior	5	15	1	4	After the mediation had come into our lives the discipline problems decreased/ Thanks to mediation they solve the problems more easily than before.
Effects on Students' Conflict Resolution Skills	8	24	9	32	They understood that the conflicts can be solved and there are solution options/ They realized that they could solve their problems by talking
Effects on School	4	12	4	14	Number of students who are sent to the discipline committee decreased the / there fewer discipline problems
Total	33	100	28	100	

The prevalent category among the student statements regarding the effects of conflict resolution and peer mediation training on their schools was "effects on student fights" (females 30% and males 39%). Both male and female mediator students believed that, as a result of the conflict resolution and peer mediation training in their school, there were fewer fights, students chose mediation, and that when there was a conflict, mediators intervened and mediated a solution, and therefore, the number of fights decreased and most fights were prevented. These statements provide evidence of improvement in skills such as "learning nonviolent methods of dealing with conflict" and "choosing mediation as an alternative form of conflict resolution in the schools". Similarly, a significant number of mediator students (females 24% and males 32%), emphasized "effects on students' conflict resolution skills" as another important category. Mediator student statements in this category underline the transformative and educational characteristics of mediation. They provide evidence of how mediation, in and of itself, can change, improve and transform individuals. All these statements lead us to believe that students change, develop, and socialize, i.e. transform while resolving their conflicts.

Another category that was stressed, especially by female students, was "effects on student conflicts" (females 18% and males 11%). Mediator students claimed that student fights and conflicts decreased as a result of the training program. As can be seen in mediator student statements, conflict resolution and peer mediation approach emerges as an efficient remedy for student fights and conflicts. In line with these statements, mediator students (females 12% and males 14%) stated that there had been a drop in the number of discipline problems and discipline referrals in the school as a result of the implementation of the conflict resolution and peer mediation training program. These statements provide evidence that conflict resolution and peer mediation training could be offered as a remedy for disciplinary problems.

### Discussion and Conclusion

This study analyzed the effects of a conflict resolution and peer mediation program implemented in a high school through the perspective of the mediator students. When asked how they felt when they became mediators, students provided noteworthy responses. Among these were happiness, excitement, elation, feeling different, feeling good and benevolence. The most prevalent reason students stated, in particular for happiness and elation, was partaking in reconciling their friends' disputes and conflicts and contributing to a peaceful resolution of their interpersonal conflicts. Similarly, student statements clearly show that direct involvement in and contribution to the peaceful resolution of their friends' disputes and conflicts foster feelings of benevolence and goodwill. Based on student statements, we could argue that reconciling individuals' differences fosters social, emotional, and moral development. Within the limitations of the study, it is also possible to claim that peer mediation programs in schools may also have a transformative aspect. It is highly meaningful that students felt happy playing a role in reconciling and patching up the hurt relationships of their friends and, at the same time, named this as the most important accomplishment of the mediation process.

Another theme emphasized by the students was self esteem and self-confidence. Mediator students expressly stated that they felt themselves good and special for reconciling their friends' conflicts, so much so that one student felt himself as a hero, which indicates an improvement in the self-image and self-perception of the mediator students. On a similar note, mediator students claimed to have observed a clear boost in their self-confidence and their friends' trust in them. In particular, helping their friends resolve their conflicts caused them to feel a greater sense of accomplishment. These findings are in line with several other researchers (Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Maxwell, 1989; Messing, 1993; Thompson, 1996) who argued that peer mediation is an important tool in the fostering of self esteem for both mediators and disputants.

Students also believe that serving as a mediator contributed to their personal development. Two of the basic skills highlighted by the mediation process are anger management, and communication and listening skills. Furthermore, they refrained from using sarcastic and insinuating remarks. They now choose to solve problems through dialog and manage their anger more effectively. Instead of repressing their emotions, they now communicate them constructively. Based on these statements, we may argue that, through mediation process, students develop self-control and self regulation skills, monitor negative destructive feelings and communicate those feelings in a constructive manner. These findings are in support of other researchers' such as Johnson and Johnson (1996b, 1997), Jones (2004), Lane and McWhirter (1992), Maxwell (1989), and Moriarty and McDonald (1991). The source of these effects may stem from the fact that students reflect both on themselves and on their friends which underlines the reflective learning aspect of mediation.

Another personal development skill students put forward was perspective taking or empathetic development. Mediator students claim to have developed both listening and active listening skills through these sessions. Mediator students believe that thanks to the mediation sessions they now understand their friends' emotions better, both by empathizing with them and by helping them empathize with each other. Gehlbach (2004), reports similar results from the findings of other research that perspective taking, as the cognitive dimension of empathy, is often thought to be a critical component in conflict resolution and student mediation programs.

In terms of personal development, the most common theme among student statements was the improved conflict resolution skills. One statement in particular was very meaningful; "We realized that the conflicts could be resolved constructively". Students stated that, after becoming mediators, they were now able to better understand the dynamics of fights and why their friends fought. The dialogs that took place in the mediation sessions both contributed to the resolution of conflicts and provided information and raised student awareness of the dynamics, reasons and the process of fights. Mediator student stated that they did not fight anymore and chose to

communicate instead of fighting, and handled conflicts in a more peaceful manner. Furthermore, they were able to maintain their calm through heated arguments, choose dialog as the first course of action and withhold themselves. These provide evidence for the transformative aspect of mediation. Mediator students go through a positive transformation as a result of the mediation process whereby they facilitate negotiation of their friends' conflicts. All these findings in the current research confirm the findings of other research by western scholars such as Bettmann and Moore (1994), Bickmore (2002), Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Miller & Landry (2000). Humphries, (1999), Johnson and Johnson (2004), Jones (2004), Lane and McWhirter (1992), Williamson, Warner, Sanders, & Knepper (1999).

Mediator students also expressed that they transferred the conflict resolution skills they learned at school outside the school context. They stated that they were able to use these skills in handling neighborhood and domestic arguments among the family members. These student statements, we may lead to the conclusion that mediator students can use the skills they attained while mediating their friends' conflicts in the school context throughout their lives both in their interpersonal relationships and their careers. Several other researchers also point to a positive transfer of the conflict resolution skills into other areas of students' lives (Johnson and Johnson, 1996c; Moriarty and McDonald, 1991; Williamson, Warner, Sanders, & Knepper, 1999).

Mediator students claimed that as students in the school developed better conflict resolution skills, interpersonal conflicts and fights decreased. Peer mediation was found to reduce aggression and violence by other researchers in the field as well (Bettmann and Moore, 1994; Bickmore, 2002; Jones, 2004; Fast, Fanelli and Salen, 2003). While fights were left to take their course in the past, they were now intervened by the mediators and disputants were coaxed into making peace which resulted in a decrease in fights and a qualitative transformation in relationships.

Being a mediator also had significant contributions to mediator students' social relationships. Based on the experiences they had during mediation sessions, mediator students reported that they established new friendships with disputants and that their existing friendships also improved, which, as Johnson and Johnson (1996d) call, is a central and significant hallmark of social development and which equipped mediators with a developmental advantage over their peers who were not trained as mediators (Johnson & Johnson, 1995c). Students who come to mediation experience an alternative approach based on dialog and mutual understanding and reciprocal empathy as an alternative to violence. This experience enables them to understand each other and impacts their communication skills. Therefore, the process increased the number of friends they had. Furthermore, the quality and the dynamics of their friendships were also significantly affected by this process.

Notwithstanding the positive effects of mediation listed by the mediator students, some of them made reference to the negative aspects of mediation. Among these, resistance to mediation was the leading concern. In particular, students who did not believe in mediation as a problem solving approach showed resistance to the process. Another negative aspect was the negative attitude of the students who looked down upon and belittled the mediators due to lack of familiarity with the process.

In light of these discussions, we could argue that, if implemented properly, peer mediation model as a conflict resolution approach may offer significant benefits to mediator students. Perhaps, mediator students will probably benefit the most from the training and the implementation of the model. The empowering nature of peer mediation which enables students to resolve their own conflicts constructively by themselves or with the help of a class mate, offers significant implications. In this context, promoting peer mediation model may contribute to the personal development of students and increase the instruction time. School violence can neither be reduced nor prevented by focusing on the violence itself. The primary focus should be on ways to teach students to develop constructive life skills as an alternative to violence which is a destructive problem solving method. As the students learn about constructive, peaceful and restorative conflict resolution methods, it is believed that they will resort to violence less.

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