Responding to a Schoolwide Conflict Resolution–Peer Mediation Program: Case Study of a Middle School Faculty

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Conflict resolution (CR) and peer mediation (PM) programs are flourishing as alternatives to adult-mediated disciplinary models in many school settings. This study found that the degree of faculty involvement influenced the schoolwide implementation of the CR-PM program described here. Faculty interviews reveal a progression of teacher concerns as teachers become involved in change. Results suggest that understanding a faculty's perspective within the context of a CR-PM program can lead to constructive problem solving when implementing a schoolwide program that is designed to change the way school professionals respond to discipline problems.

Without a doubt, the successful management of disruptive and maladaptive student behavior by school professionals is a priority in the preservation of a safe school environment. Andrews, Soberman, and Dishion (1995) believe that middle schools are often a primary venue for problem behaviors such as violence, vandalism, and delinquency. Unacceptable student behavior, however, is often managed by punitive measures that can, in turn, contribute to escalating conflicts among students and educators (Gunter and others, 1993). Unfortunately, approaches to school problems are often adult-directed and punitive, making little use of intrinsic values in student behavior change (Lindsay, 1998).

Many researchers and educators advocate that effective prevention of behavior problems must combine person-centered, skill-building interventions with changes in the ecological context in which these behaviors occur (for example, Andrews, Soberman, Dishion, 1995). Teaching CR can help students build appropriate social responses and anger management approaches for use when they are faced with conflict situations. PM—a part of CR—is a specific skill that can teach the adaptive resolution of conflict through a student-facilitated,

problem-solving format (Long, Fabricius, Musheno, and Palumbo, 1988). The schoolwide practice of CR and PM are viable options to more traditional, punitive practices that rely on the adult control of student discipline problems.

CR and PM focus on students as change agents. When students resolve their own disputes, they need not rely on adult intervention. Teachers and other education professionals are then freed from handling behavior problems among students to the extent that is now common. When students take more responsibility for resolving their own problems with others, the more traditional disciplinary practices that depend on adult control are challenged. As a result, school professionals who routinely use punitive disciplinary practices may be uncomfortable with the novelty and the necessary change that go along with a program such as CR-PM.

Implementing School Change

School change can be initiated by introducing a program that is new to the institution (White, 1990) and using the process of diffusion to disseminate information about it. *Diffusion* is the process by which an innovation such as CR-PM is communicated over time to members of a social system (Gingiss, 1992). According to Rogers (1983), diffusion is a special type of communication used in relaying information about a new idea. Rogers argues that the perceived "newness" of the innovation for the individual determines his or her reaction to it. According to diffusion theory, success in implementing any innovative change such as CR-PM is determined by its effect on teachers and administrators.

Hunkins and Ornstein (1989) view the school as a center of change rather than as an object to be changed. Of particular importance is understanding and approaching school change efforts from the faculty's perspective (White, 1990). White refers to efforts of the teacher rather than the merits of a specific program itself as being responsible for schoolwide adaptation. In our study, we wanted to investigate CR-PM's overall effectiveness in the school, but as we proceeded, the importance of the teacher's role in implementing such an innovative change became evident.

Because teachers are pivotal in most efforts to successfully implement change in schools, factors involving their perceptions of the change effort are important to consider (White, 1990). How teachers are likely to react when innovations potentially interrupt the educational status quo (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall, 1987) is important when seeking their cooperation. Rogers (1983) relates that different rates of adopting an innovation are determined by the degree of (1) consistency with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters, (2) difficulty in understanding and using it, and (3) latitude to experiment with the innovation on a limited basis. Rogers also points out that adoption of an innovation can be determined by how the adopters perceive the relative advantage over the idea it supersedes and the degree to which the results of the innovation are visible to others.

Hall, George, and Rutherford (1979) conclude that as teachers become involved in change, their perceptions or concerns change over the course of the innovation. Hall and his colleagues have identified seven steps (zero through six) that an individual might go through in experiencing change. The first three stages focus on the self, in which a teacher's first concerns are unrelated to the innovation itself. For example, a teacher's lack of awareness about CR-PM's mechanics, desire to obtain more information before making a judgment about or referral to CR-PM, and concerns about how making a referral would affect the classroom illustrate the successive progression through the first three stages. The central or third stage would involve management issues and the use of an innovation within the school.

The last three stages address how an innovation will alter the school structure (for example, how present disciplinary practices may change when managing disruptive behavior). The fourth stage focuses on the relevance of the innovation to teachers, such as how to deal with absences when mediators and disputants are in mediation. The fifth stage involves thoughts about coordinating and engaging others' cooperation in using the innovation. Teachers are in the last stage when they are concerned about making changes and considering alternatives to further strengthen the innovation.

The stages reflect a hierarchical order, which starts with the *self,* progresses to *task,* and moves to *impact.* Change in a schoolhouse, for example, can only occur as individuals change because successful innovation reflects the personal concerns and involvement of individuals over time (Cicchelli and Baecher, 1989). Programs found most likely to fail were those implemented without proper teacher training and support and not involving teachers as active agents in the innovation process (Kimpston and Anderson, 1988). Cicchelli and Baecher believe that efforts to gain cooperation and further involve faculty should change as their concerns change. For example, as CR-PM becomes a regular part of a school's routine, keeping a focus on improving the program would then be appropriate.

The dispute resolution system model (Ury, Brett, and Goldberg, 1988) relates to Hall's stages of concern when viewing the prospect of change as a threatening event (for example, CR-PM being promoted as a more effective program to resolving conflict than typical discipline procedures). According to the model, there is a relationship among interests (needs, desires, concerns, fears—the things one cares about or wants), rights (independent standards concerning legitimacy or fairness), and power (the ability to coerce someone to do something he or she would not otherwise do by imposing or threatening consequences for noncompliance). The focus may shift from interests to rights to power and back again when two parties are in the process of resolving a dispute (for example, when enthusiastic teachers attempting to convince resistant teachers to accept and use the novel and innovative program).

This study explores the possible variables influencing the implementation of a schoolwide CR program using PM in a middle school. CR-PM is a program

that necessitates schoolwide implementation and, as a result, a schoolwide change effort. Considering and accommodating the variables related to implementation of an innovative program such as CR-PM are crucial to a school's successful adaptation. New and innovative programs that challenge a faculty's comfort level and routine existence may risk losing their appeal when difficulties surface. Thus, faculty accommodation or assimilation must be addressed.

Method

The participating middle school services approximately one thousand students in grades six through eight, and the staff expresses pride in its history and tradition of academic excellence. The dean of students handles minor problem behavior (for example, disruption of class, unexcused tardiness, noncompliance). The assistant principal in charge of discipline handles more serious infractions (for example, physical fighting, sexual harassment, drugs).

The first year of the project consisted of developing curriculum, training faculty, and piloting the implementation protocols. We introduced and trained a small cohort of faculty in the delivery of the CR curriculum to all students schoolwide. Organized around five themes, the curriculum consists of lessons on understanding conflict, using effective communication, understanding and handling anger, and engaging in peer mediation. We developed three consecutive versions of the curriculum to be used progressively in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. In the Spring semester, we developed the PM part of the program by training three teachers to teach a cohort of mediators, developed procedural protocols for implementing mediations, and piloted those procedures to build on program strengths and identify weaknesses for full implementation the following year. Our goal was to empower students to make decisions on their own behalf and help others handle conflict to reflect a cooperative school environment. The dean of students then directed and scheduled PM sessions during the second year of CR-PM's operation in the school.

At the outset of the second year, we fully implemented the program by teaching CR schoolwide to all students while we promoted and established the PM program. A small cohort of students were trained to be mediators. The dean of students scheduled PM sessions that involved disputants meeting face to face with two peer mediators so that teachers' needs, such as not having to relinquish students from class during important instructional time, and students' needs, such as pairing disputants and a peer mediator in the same grade level, were considered. The dean of students accepted requests or referrals for mediation, anytime, from a teacher, administrator, or student. CR-PM's proactive intervention, which is the goal of successful CR, sought to reduce the likelihood of more serious conflicts and behavioral problems for students.

Participants. As part of the second-year research activities, we conducted a total of twenty-one interviews with teachers and administrators. We conducted seventeen teacher interviews, which accounts for nearly one-third

of the teaching faculty during a four-month period in the middle of the academic year. At the time the interviews began, the program had been fully operational for three months. Interviews were held in teachers' classrooms and lasted approximately thirty minutes each. We sampled teachers to reflect each grade level and special education. Further, the teachers we interviewed represented from one to more than twenty-five years of teaching experience. Interviews with administrators included the principal, assistant principal in charge of discipline, the dean of students, and a guidance counselor. We conducted interviews with the administrators in their offices; they lasted approximately thirty minutes.

Interview Guide. We used previously validated survey instruments to evaluate teacher and student views of school climate and student attitudes and behaviors about conflict to format a standard interview protocol for this study. We formulated questions, modified them after review, and submitted the protocol to two university professors who were familiar with research in CR and had extensive background and expertise in qualitative research. The dean of students—the key figure in CR-PM's schoolwide implementation—was interviewed first to pilot the set of questions. As all of the questions yielded appropriate and relevant responses related to CR-PM's implementation, we did no further modification to the interview protocol.

Our set of interview questions (see Exhibit 1) addressed two areas: (1) the effectiveness of the program and (2) the school's situation regarding existing conflict. The dean of students explained to teachers that participating in the interviews was not mandatory; teachers were agreeable and offered some degree of flexibility about scheduling the interview. Teachers were approached

Exhibit 1. Interview Protocol for Teachers and Administrators

Program Effectiveness

1. What is your understanding of the CR-PM program?
2. What do you think are the program's strengths and weaknesses?
3. What do you like about it?
4. How do you think the program is going?
5. What do you think could be improved?

School Situation

1. What kinds of conflicts do you see here among the students?
2. What are the most problematic kinds of conflict? Are they usually resolved?
3. What types of categories of students might generally be involved in a dispute?
4. Have you ever made a referral to PM? In what instances would you most likely make a referral? When would you not?
5. Have you noticed any student resistance to trying mediation if a referral was suggested?
6. Has the program had any positive effects? What? Why?

Note: Probes were used when appropriate.

as they were available (for example, during their planning period or when out in the hallway or faculty lounge). All interviews from the sample were used for data generation.

Data Analysis. All faculty interviews were tape recorded, with the faculty member's permission. Field notes and recordings from the audiotapes were typed into formal transcriptions. We maintained a logbook while interviewing to keep track of our experiences such as observations and comments we could not capture on tape. The transcripts averaged approximately twelve pages for each interview. We reviewed the interview data for themes and patterns to identify appropriate domains for coding the data (for example, cause of conflict, student emotional and social development, and authoritarian teaching attitudes). The themes and patterns were analyzed further and categorized under emerging hypothetical constructs or domains; themes and patterns were then compared to the literature on school change and the implementation of change.

Before the final interpretation of our analyses, each respondent received a copy of the transcript of their interview for review. At the time transcripts were mailed out, two of the faculty members were not with the school and were not accessible. Thirteen (62 percent) returned the transcripts; all of the respondents agreed with the accuracy of the transcriptions, and only a few minor changes were needed. We obtained the respondents' perspectives, which involved teachers reviewing and affirming the accuracy of their interview transcripts (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Results

All of the faculty interviewed expressed both positive and negative views about CR-PM's implementation in the school. No faculty member consistently expressed either a positive or negative point of view. Thus, teachers and administrators expressed numerous issues related to CR-PM's implementation in their school. From the data, we established the following domains: (1) conflict as sole focus, (2) CR-PM versus traditional disciplinary methods, (3) faculty resistance, (4) faculty experiences, and (5) student characteristics.

Conflict as Sole Focus. Faculty consistently perceived conflict as an important and worthwhile focus for intervention. Some of the faculty, however, expressed the belief that the program's focus was too restrictive; one teacher commented that a broader approach might be more appropriate. Some faculty acknowledged that only minor degrees of conflict existed in the school and maintained that academic achievement was the school's main focus. An administrator elaborated further in response to questioning about the positive impact of CR-PM's implementation:

> We didn't have a whole lot of conflict to begin with, so it has been negligible. I don't know if there has been any decrease in conflict; we don't have that many. I think it is very difficult to tell . . . we haven't noticed anything measurable.

Faculty who interpreted the nature of conflict more broadly were able to acknowledge the pervasive existence and implications of conflict in the school. One teacher stated:

> We see all kinds of conflicts . . . from girlfriend to boyfriend conflicts to razor blades to toy guns. Fights in the cafeteria . . . food fights. There is conflict . . . why do we have all these U's (suspensions), Saturday school? Problems start out as a conflict, and this program can prevent a lot of this.

Although faculty acknowledged most forms of conflict as being relatively minor (for example, he-said-she-said arguments, play fighting or fooling around, and name calling), they noted concerns about how quickly conflicts can escalate into serious problems. One teacher noted:

> Sometimes in the mornings, when I come up here and our kids are out in the street waiting for school to start . . . and they'll be with their friends, and they'll be punching and playing rough, and then all of a sudden they're in a fight. When they meet someone who's not their friend, it's even worse. They don't know how to deal with it. When something comes up that they don't like or don't understand, [the students experience] anger immediately. They'll choose a way of dealing with it that's totally inappropriate . . . it didn't click in their minds that they could have approached it a different way. So they got into a conflict.

Faculty who felt conflict was too narrow a focus for a schoolwide program, did not see CR-PM as meeting the needs of the school. One teacher noted:

> I don't see conflict as one of our largest problems in our school. A broader approach might be more appropriate for our school's needs . . . dealing with counseling in the whole realm of things. With a broader scope, perhaps we can help them with other situations, which would also help reduce conflict.

Such beliefs by faculty, however, dismiss CR-PM's attempts to decrease more serious disruptive behaviors by directly focusing on conflict. Many faculty who minimized the role that conflict played in their classroom felt it was their role to take care of minor disruptions swiftly. Related comments included one teacher's need to "nip it in the bud . . . I just take care of it right there, and that's the end of it."

Despite citing practical needs (for example, not being able to wait until a mediation could take place when immediate attention was necessary) or supporting an authoritarian preference, faculty's reliance on personal competence in handling conflict prevented referrals for peer mediation.

CR-PM Versus Traditional Disciplinary Methods. Being frustrated with the ineffectiveness of traditional disciplinary practices was a recurring theme

among the faculty. A broad range of feelings about ongoing behavioral disruptions by students was represented. A teacher with over twenty years of teaching experience expressed anger toward problem students:

> I think these kids with real behavior problems, that are disrupting classes and that are making life miserable for kids and teachers, need to be removed from the classroom totally and just stuck in a loop that they can't get out of . . . you know talking to them all day long isn't going to help. It just isn't.

Supporting the removal of students with serious behavior problems from the mainstream is related to faculty who advocate for immediate solutions. Such faculty beliefs are in contrast to preventive types of programs such as CR-PM that seek to deter, over time, the escalation of more serious behavior problems.

Faculty who freely admitted the versatility of PM as a vehicle to resolve conflicts acknowledged CR-PM as an effective alternative to traditional disciplinary practices. In particular, faculty related positively to CR-PM when comparing it to exclusionary types of discipline. One teacher specifically credited the program's realistic portrayal of anger and conflict. Another teacher referred positively to developmental considerations taken into account by CR-PM:

> I see it trying to give a tool, a handle to young people who are at an age in their life when conflict is a natural part of life, but they don't know how to deal with it. I feel like this program helps them to focus on there being ways and steps to deal with anger and emotions . . . not fly off the handle and say whatever comes to their mind.

Some faculty were enthusiastic because of the preventive and long-term benefits of CR-PM. One teacher stated:

> I think it's going to be a big help. It's going to take some of the stress off [the dean of students] who deals with detention and having to send kids home and all of that . . . it's going to keep the kids in school . . . they won't miss out on a lot of things they need to get.

Faculty Resistance. Faculty who expressed a strict authoritarian style in managing student misbehavior demonstrated their lack of confidence in CR-PM's decreased emphasis on adult leadership. Such faculty did not trust the idea that students can resolve problems without direct adult involvement. Examples of doubt were related to the lack of student sincerity in taking the mediation attempt seriously, the appropriateness of the peer mediator selected to facilitate mediation, and the possible ineffectiveness of CR-PM in reaching the more deeply troubled students. A teacher who expressed difficulties coping with behavior problem students adamantly stated:

> [Troubled students] need to be totally removed from the normal learning environment and be put where somebody can really work with them and say

you're not getting out of this until you change your behavior . . . the attitude change will come later.

Such faculty appeared the most resistant to referring a student for mediation. The majority of the faculty, however, who admitted concerns about the appropriateness of certain students selected to be peer mediators ("How can you expect them to help other students if they can't even control themselves?"), expressed pleasure when seeing how being a peer mediator helped to increase students' self-control. An administrator related this relevant example:

> I did have one little girl come in; she's an eighth grader, and she was mad at another kid and she was ready to belt her and she did say "I know I'm a PM and I'm supposed to set an example . . . but I really want to hit her." At least she had some sense to come in here and blow her stack and recognize that she was not supposed to be involved in direct conflict. That was good.

As an alternative to traditional disciplinary practices, PM was often hailed as an effective and resourceful intervention to deter problems from escalating out of control. One administrator regarded PM as an "intervention that prevents, rather than [happens] after the fact." A teacher further related that "this is like an intervention to help [students] think about it before [punishment] stuff happens." In particular, faculty found PM appealing because it is an alternative to more punitive measures of action such as being sent to the office or to detention, or suspended.

Many teachers who openly embraced the use of nonpunitive approaches, however, said they did not understand when it was appropriate to use PM. For example, a teacher described her uncertainty about what situations should prompt a referral of a student for mediation:

> We've sent notes home . . . tried to call parents and work with them . . . trying to do everything whether it's time-out, trying to counsel with them, some I've referred to the guidance counselor. But they end up . . . with your detention or Saturday school or those types of things. But it would be some of those same students if I thought [they] would benefit . . . I would like to see go to peer mediation. So I think I'm still struggling . . . if they just consistently disrupt my class, is that something that can be dealt with in peer mediation, or is it just when they have conflicts with other students, whether or not it disrupts my class?

Despite consistent reports by faculty of their understanding CR-PM as an alternative option in lieu of punishment, examples of such confusion about how and when it would be appropriate to use PM were frequent.

Faculty Experiences. Faculty who lacked a full understanding of CR-PM operating in the school related difficulties with the mechanics of the program. Not unlike having difficulty running a piece of computer software (for

example, learning a new word processing program), some faculty did not feel they knew enough about CR-PM to use it properly. Statements in response to how the program was perceived to be working were consistent, which was neatly summed up by a teacher:

> I really have no idea. We do not, they do not keep us apprised of it. All I see is a list of students. I have no idea where they go. I mean, there's a list up in the hall. That's the only way I know that there's a couple of our kids on the team. I have no idea.

A great majority also had no direct experience in the referral of a student to mediation. Some of the faculty simply stated not knowing how a referral could be initiated. Faculty also cited a lack of communication and expressed anger about feeling left out as a result. One teacher stated:

> I feel this about a lot of things the school does. Seems like things get insti-
> tuted and a few people have worked on the committee or whatever it is to
> start the program, and they don't do a good job of getting the information
> to the teachers. Because like I'm saying, I feel sort of ignorant on the subject.
> It might have been briefly introduced to the faculty at a meeting at the begin-
> ning of the year . . . we didn't go over it in any kind of extensive way. So I
> guess I just feel that information given out to the teachers hasn't been what
> it should be.

The same teacher had constructive ideas about how to enhance commu-
nication and increase information to make CR-PM more user-friendly for
everyone. He suggested having experiential types of in-service for the faculty
(for example, an information session with role playing to "give us situations
where we would deal with them . . . where we normally send a child to the
dean or deal with it in a certain way and then sort of say well these are things
that peer mediation can do for you") and an assembly for students and faculty.
He also suggested that during homeroom the use of the school's internal tele-
vision monitors could be used to "do some kind of hands-on thing, if they gave
us a script or scenario to act out."

Another teacher, who considered herself more directly involved with CR-
PM (she had taught the five-lesson CR curriculum), described the importance
of communicating information to the students:

> I don't have enough time to really do the things that I would like to do
> with the mediation program. I'd like to have, maybe, get the whole school
> involved . . . if I had an extra period during the day, get them all in the
> gym . . . maybe learn mediation songs and things like that . . . maybe
> we could bring somebody in to talk to the kids about the mediation and
> maybe afterwards we could have a rally or street dance or something.

The teacher's reason for more ongoing, dynamic types of activities was to "keep it fresh in their minds, keep it talked up. I think if it's out-of-sight, sometimes it's out-of-mind." The same principle could be analogous to faculty as well. Passive-aggressive resistance to cooperation by faculty, who dismiss PM as an ineffective intervention simply because not enough feedback is communicated to them, undermines CR-PM's effective schoolwide implementation.

Other practical concerns that interfered with faculty making referrals for mediation were about how quickly the escalation of a conflict, which may initially be minor, can occur. Some teachers expressed concern that certain conflicts require immediate attention; the length of time from making a referral to effecting a mediation can sometimes be too long. For example, a teacher said, "A lot of times the incident, you know, takes place in the morning . . . and by that afternoon, they're ready to fight. So, it's got to be something that can be done, you know, a little bit quicker." In particular, difficulty scheduling within the middle school framework was an often-stated handicap. Faculty who expressed willingness to relinquish the idea that direct adult intervention is needed in any conflict between students also requested reassurance that there would be timely availability of PM when needed.

Student Characteristics. Citing an understanding of the developmental and social-emotional issues pertaining to adolescence consistently influenced faculty's approval of CR-PM's mission. That is, providing CR-PM as a chance for students to resolve their own problems was respectful of adolescents' need for autonomy and control of their lives. In fact, faculty attributed CR-PM's greatest appeal for students as an intervention not directly involving adults. A teacher best appreciated an adolescent's point of view by stating:

> I think in middle school especially, twelve-, thirteen-, fourteen-year-olds sometimes see adults as authority figures and sometimes they associate . . . categorize all adults as being the same. Maybe that if I were to tell the student, you know, do this or do that, they might see it as "oh, boy, it's just another adult trying to tell us what to do, just like mom, just like dad." When the student is a mediator, they can relate . . . there's something that students are more willing to accept or simply listen to if it comes from another student.

Faculty regarded a student's peers as having a potentially greater influence because a student would not feel as defensive as if directed by an adult. Further, faculty felt that students in charge of resolving conflict were empowered and encouraged to take responsibility for their behavior. An administrator agreed, stating that PM was "causing students to think more about their actions rather than just acting emotionally."

As we stated earlier, CR-PM's mission is to prevent the development of more serious emotional or behavioral problems. Some faculty expressed having

lost hope for some of those students with deep-rooted emotional problems. One teacher stated:

> There are too many hard-core kids that I see coming through, more year after year because there is almost no turning around students because no one has ever made them change. I can see how it would work for a small percentage of them. But on a big scale, as far as cutting down on the discipline problems that the schools are having in the middle schools? No. Something else needs to be done.

These faculty felt that more traditional, punitive forms of discipline were necessary to address students they considered unreachable by mediation. Problems designated by faculty as not suitable for mediation were conflict that had escalated (for example, physical fighting) and issues such as sexual harassment. Additional concerns about potential limitations of the peer mediators themselves was often stated. Faculty cited examples of peer mediators lacking sophistication in their abilities to mediate, which included their difficulty facilitating discussion, not knowing the appropriate action to take, leading students in the wrong direction, and giving up when discouraged by problems within a mediation. Faculty more involved and knowledgeable about the training and availability of support options for peer mediators (for example, scheduled group process meetings with a teacher) were more inclined to see that mediators could engage in ongoing development.

Discussion

Our results are not surprising in that the CR-PM program was new to most faculty. We thought at the outset of our second year that most if not all faculty would embrace the curriculum and become active participants and advocates for the ongoing PM program. As a result of our presence at several faculty meetings, several survey administrations, and several written communiqués about the program to all teachers during the first and second years, we were certain that all faculty were aware of the program. Most were aware, but in actuality, only a small handful of teachers truly understood the nature of the program because they had participated in pilot year activities and the delivery of the curriculum. These teachers were more familiar with the goals and objectives of the program than the rest of the faculty were.

According to Lindsay (1998), it takes several years for a program such as CR-PM to become part of valued school activities. Because CR-PM challenges a traditional disciplinary practice of direct adult involvement to resolve conflict among students, it is no wonder that some of the faculty we interviewed expressed difficulty in accepting such an innovation. Some faculty stated their inability to see how CR-PM can achieve the same results as more exclusionary, punitive forms of action in gaining control of problem behavior. When viewing

resistance by faculty at face value, successfully implementing innovation such as CR-PM appears improbable. The process of innovation implementation is as much a political task of garnering support and overcoming resistance for the program as it is a technical task involved in its implementation (Ury, Brett, and Goldberg, 1988).

According to Ury and his colleagues (1988), implementing innovation involves two tasks: motivating the parties to use the new procedures and helping them develop the skills to do so. They believe that motivating consumers (school faculty) can be accomplished by (1) demonstrating the procedures (for example, providing opportunities to observe CR-PM in action), (2) using leaders as examples (for example, having the school principal facilitate some peer mediations), and (3) using peers as proponents (for example, having teachers who train mediators spread the word). Ury and his colleagues also suggest setting goals (for example, a decrease in discipline referrals), providing incentives, and publicizing early successes.

In addition to Ury's foundational aspects of successful implementation, we were interested in understanding further the issues related to CR-PM's acceptance in the school by looking at the different stages of teacher concern according to Hall, George, and Rutherford (1979).

Faculty still struggling with personal concerns not related to the innovation itself reflected Hall's first three stages. Understanding this is crucial because this is a starting point to work through a faculty member's initial resistance to change. For example, faculty who were confused about situations warranting a referral also expressed concerns about how CR-PM might affect their classroom (for example, how they could integrate a student back into the class after mediation). The data indicate that faculty with the most information and direct experience with CR-PM were the most comfortable with its innovation. These faculty would be categorized in Hall's latter stages because of their decreased emphasis on personal concerns about the realities of CR-PM. Many faculty, however, expressed their concern about the lack of ongoing information on the school's use of CR-PM. Even faculty who openly expressed willingness and enthusiasm for the program still regarded CR-PM with caution simply because of their inexperience with it. For faculty in Hall's first three stages, activities such as an increase in schoolwide information sharing may put staff more at ease about their personal concerns with CR-PM. Further, it is important to involve faculty in an innovation's implementation to be in the best position to gain their approval and support (Ury, Brett, and Goldberg, 1988). If Sacca (1991) is correct, commitment follows competence. Only after a teacher has developed skills via hands-on training to gain sufficient knowledge and experience in CR-PM can the teacher make a competent decision about commitment.

Faculty who were more experienced with CR-PM (for example, having referred a student for mediation about a conflict in the classroom), reflected Hall's central stage—management issues. Related examples are concerns about

working out scheduling difficulties, maintaining CR-PM as user-friendly for teachers, and increasing awareness of and understanding about CR-PM among teachers and students. Faculty in this stage expressed feeling more comfortable with and having a greater investment in CR-PM's successful adaptation to the school. However, even if all faculty members are involved in the change process, opposition may still occur in teachers who feel their perceived role (for example, as disciplinarian) is being threatened or in those who simply are successful with what they are presently using (Ury, Brett, and Goldberg, 1988).

How an innovation will alter the structure of the school, as reflected in Hall's last three stages, illustrates CR-PM's schoolwide impact. An overall example relates to teacher speculation about a decrease in "incidents" possibly influencing a more harmonious classroom environment.

The fourth stage demonstrates faculty concern about the student use of CR-PM. For example, faculty acknowledged that less learning time was lost as a result of incidents such as verbal threats or fighting that were mediated. These incidents would ordinarily have led to exclusionary forms of punishment such as suspension. Faculty who referred to their regular use of CR-PM as a viable option over the use of discipline when conflict occurred between students, also expressed concern about how to motivate and engage cooperation of faculty who were detached from CR-PM. Such concerns relate to Hall's fifth stage—staff concerns about collaborating with other faculty to improve the outcomes of an innovation. Some of the faculty who were in the fifth stage expressed disappointment in other staff for not cooperating by referring students to mediation for situations they considered appropriate and opportune. These teachers still expressed concerns about using CR-PM and were not ready to progress to a higher stage of concern. Teachers who have used an innovation efficiently for a period of time, refocusing and finding better ways to reach students, are indicative of the sixth stage, although few teachers have these types of concerns (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall, 1987). Teachers in our study who we believed were in the last stage, however, discussed how to make CR-PM more practical for student use. For example, teachers such as special educators who handled behavior problems on an ongoing basis and who embraced the preventive concepts of CR-PM, deliberated how to integrate and apply the curriculum aspects of conflict resolution skills with their students.

Cicchelli and Baecher (1989) emphasize those efforts to gain cooperation and note that further faculty involvement should also change as concerns change. For example, focusing on alternatives to improve CR-PM would be appropriate when faculty members progress from personal concerns (reflective of Hall's lower stages) to the central stage and beyond. The data in our study illustrate some of the constraining factors (for example, feeling left out of the information loop), as well as factors that increase (for example, seeing successful student mediation) the likelihood that faculty will move from lower

to higher levels of concern. CR-PM's innovative program would seem to have an improved chance for schoolwide adaptation when more faculty exhibit Hall's latter stages of concern.

Implications of the Results

Most important, the data in our study were based on the perceptions of teachers and administrators. A wide range of both positive and negative views, often expressed by the same individual, were represented. Regardless of whether faculty perceptions were positive or negative, they appeared to influence faculty members' degree of involvement with CR-PM implementation.

Our data reveal three implications of faculty perceptions in which faculty understanding appeared to contribute to the successful institutional implementation of an innovation. The three issues related to schoolwide implementation of CR-PM are (1) a faculty member's personal beliefs about the innovation's focus (for example, CR-PM's goal to decrease conflict), (2) developmental issues related to the population that the innovation proposes to change (for example, adolescents as the target population of CR-PM), and (3) the impact on educational practice (for example, a decreased emphasis on punitive disciplinary practices) by an innovation's implementation.

There was a varied range of faculty perceptions about conflict; some reported having little conflict in the school, and some were concerned about the increasing bouts of conflict among students that resulted in physical violence. Not answered in this study is whether such differences in the perception of conflict may have interfered with schoolwide acceptance of CR-PM. Some of the faculty prefaced their neutral regard for CR-PM as a function of feeling that conflict was only a minor issue for the school. Such statements, however, likely ignore student perceptions about conflict, which may be different from those of the faculty (see Hessler, Hollis, and Crowe, 1998). Student responses might be rich in a context that teachers may not have access to, such as fighting with a sibling for the front seat of the car or coming to school angry after arguing with a parent. We found faculty to be more specific about what they viewed as causing conflict, for example, name calling, rumor spreading, or physical fooling around. Their perceptions revealed superficial aspects about such things as immaturity due to a lack of social skills, hormonal interference, or struggles with emotional problems rather than more direct reflections of the students' point of view.

The second issue's relevance to CR-PM is with regard to developmental issues about adolescent students. Forming different relationships with adults and peers after the elementary years is a function of the adolescent's push toward autonomy (Pardeck and Pardeck, 1990). Adolescent students place increasing priority on relating with peers, which is an important consideration in CR-PM's decreased emphasis on adult control over discipline problems. CR-PM directly relates to an adolescent's push toward individuation and

autonomy. Many of the faculty acknowledged the value and effectiveness in reaching adolescent students by using other students rather than adults as authority figures to intervene on their behalf. Other faculty overlooked the importance of adolescent development when they doubted the appropriateness of CR-PM for middle school students.

Reflective of Hall's latter stages of concern—issues about CR-PM's impact on current educational practices in the middle school—was the third implication of our study. Many of the faculty acknowledged CR-PM's potential for long-term benefits and saw how proactively resolving conflict would influence the school environment positively. Educational practice relying on traditional disciplinary measures, however, was perceived by some of the faculty as necessary to maintain order and control in the school. Such faculty were unable to see how placing students in charge of resolving conflict would be effective without adult involvement. For reasons not determined in our study, such faculty were not ready to accept the change that would accompany CR-PM's innovation. As faculty are in charge of providing an education to their students, any program that would help decrease disruptions to the teaching process needs their direct involvement for successful implementation.

In summary, middle school settings provide a natural context for effective, preventive intervention to alter problem behavior (Andrews, Soberman, and Dishion, 1995). Yet relying on an innovative program's (CR-PM's) potential ability to effect positive schoolwide change is not enough to promote its successful adaptation. For example, not until successful peer mediation had been experienced and talked about did it become more acceptable by students and faculty as a preventive alternative to more traditional disciplinary methods. Ramifications since CR-PM's initial implementation include teacher perceptions about conflict, understanding of and appreciation for adolescent development issues, and regard for a decreased emphasis on punitive measures to control conflict. Conducting interviews with faculty revealed important data about some of their resistance to such a program innovation as CR-PM. As the school was in its second year of participation, neglecting faculty concerns after CR-PM's initial implementation only served to alienate rather than further engage their cooperation. Successfully and fully implementing program innovation for systemwide use, therefore, requires ongoing attention to the impact of change on the participants (school faculty) in charge of directing its operations.

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