

ABSTRACT

DILLON, MAURA. Lessons from the Field: Balancing Comprehensiveness and Feasibility in Peer Mediation Programs. (Under the direction of Stanley Baker.)

The purpose of this qualitative study has been to develop a list of preliminary ideas about how to create peer mediation programs that are both realistic and maximally beneficial. The research involved reviewing recommendations made in the professional literature for creating successful programs and soliciting practical perspectives on these recommendations by interviewing five middle school counselors currently coordinating peer mediation programs. While the professional literature tends to emphasize comprehensiveness of programming (i.e. school-wide conflict resolution curricula, mediation opportunities for all students, teacher and administrator training, and discipline practices based on conflict resolution principles), the majority of programs implemented are small-scale, cadre type programs that incorporate few if any of these elements. In this study, coordinators emphasized the importance of school-wide conflict resolution curricula and of behavior management practices consistent with ideas of conflict resolution. All coordinators agreed that teacher support and awareness of a program were extremely important to the success of programs, but only two coordinators felt that teacher training was important. Most coordinators felt that training all students to be mediators was generally unrealistic and did not need to be a primary goal of an effective program. Other significant findings included the importance of having a diversity of mediators in a program, designing programs to fit individual schools, declining district support since the 1990s, importance of “selling” the program to teachers, administrators and students, and importance of having a long-term perspective for program maturity.

**LESSONS FROM THE FIELD:
BALANCING COMPREHENSIVENESS AND FEASIBILITY IN PEER
MEDIATION PROGRAMS**

by
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BIOGRAPHY

Maura Dillon was born in New London, Connecticut in 1968. She graduated from the University of California in 1989 with a bachelor's degree in Community Studies and then moved to Vermont to work as a social activist on issues including domestic violence, biotechnology, and independent media. In 1992 she moved to Berlin where she studied political philosophy at the Free University. She then moved to Durham, North Carolina where she was enrolled as a Ph.D. student at Duke University. After four years of academic immersion, she sought a more practical application of her ideas and chose to pursue a Master's in Counseling at North Carolina State University. Although she believes her own mediation and negotiation skills date back to becoming the oldest child of four in her family at age two and a half, she received her first formal mediation training at the Dispute Settlement Center in Durham. She currently resides in Pittsboro, North Carolina, where she works for child and family services at the OPC Area Program and makes functional pottery.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	3
METHOD	15
Participants	15
Recruitment	15
Participants and their Programs	16
Instrument	22
Procedure	23
Data collection	23
Data analysis	24
Audit Process	25
RESULTS	26
Benefits of Peer Mediation Programs	26
Prevents school violence and decreases bullying and teasing	26
Improves school and classroom atmosphere	27
Improves individual students' academic performance	28
Improves student self-esteem	28
Most Significant Result of Program	29
Wish List: Changes to Program	30
Important Traits for Successful Programs	32
Teacher and administrator training	32
Opportunities for all students to practice as mediators	34
Conflict resolution curriculum	35
Administrator leadership	35
Behavior management in accordance with conflict resolution theory	37
Other Themes	37
Different schools/different programs	37
Diversity of mediators	37
Diminishing district support	38
PR/Student and teacher buy-in	38
Continuity	39
Expectations and program maturity	39
DISCUSSION	41
Considerations	42
Establishing goals: how comprehensive?	42
Conflict resolution in the classroom vs. peer mediation	45

Cadre programs vs. school-wide programs	46
Becoming informed	47
Resource assessment, planning and support	47
Limitations	51
Recommendations for Future Research	52
REFERENCES	53
APPENDICES	58
Appendix A. Questionnaire	58
Appendix B. Interview instrument	60
Appendix C. Informed consent form	61
Appendix D. Auditor letter of attestation	62

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the last ten years leaders in conflict resolution education have published extensively in response to a call for empirical proof of program effectiveness. They have made concerted efforts to establish best practices and ground these with sound research and evaluation. While there is not unanimous agreement on all core elements of successful programs, most tend to agree that comprehensive programs are more effective for achieving long lasting, school-wide objectives.

Despite the fact that comprehensive programs are the best researched and have the most far-reaching success, small cadre peer mediation programs tend to be the most frequent type of program implemented. These programs are appealing because they involve students in actively improving school environments, but also because they are cheaper and easier to implement.

There is little doubt that small peer mediation programs are beneficial to some extent, but the professional literature suggests that when they are implemented on a small scale, their benefits shrink as well. This leaves educators who value conflict resolution education in a quandary. On the one hand, no matter how successful comprehensive programs are proven to be they are of little use to schools if they are not feasible. On the other hand, conducting any program at all takes time and effort, and implementing an unsuccessful program can cause burnout, resentment and mistrust.

This study focuses on practitioner assessment of some of the common research findings about what makes peer mediation programs successful. It investigates how five coordinators of middle school peer mediation programs estimate the importance of the

recommendations made in the literature based on their experience. Looking at what they find important and effective about their programs and what they find important to the success of programs generally can offer preliminary ideas about how to create programs that are both realistic and capable of bringing the greatest benefits to schools.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict resolution in schools is not a recent idea, but it was only in the last decade that it began to receive the serious attention of federal agencies such as the Department of Justice and the Department of Education. (Bodine & Crawford, 1998). In the late 1960's and throughout the 1970's educators concerned with social justice began applying principles of cooperative conflict resolution in the classroom (Pritchard, 2000). Pioneer programs in the field, such as Children's Creative Response to Conflict (CCRC) and Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers Program (TSPP), brought ideas of non-violence and mutual understanding to public schools in the early 1970's (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). In the early 1980's, other pioneering organizations such as Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR) and the Peace Education Foundation (PEF) introduced broader curricula for training students and teachers to approach personal as well as community conflicts with constructive, nonviolent strategies (Bodine & Crawford, 1998). The New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution (NMCDR) and the Community Board Program (CBP) were both founded in the mid-1980's and did a great deal to advance the development of peer mediation programs in schools (Bodine & Crawford, 1998).

In the early 1990's, new studies on school and youth violence revealed startling statistics. The National League of Cities reported that between 1990 and 1994, 33 % of member cities had a significant increase in school violence (a student killed or seriously injured), and in 1993-4, school violence increased 55 percent in large cities and 41% in cities of 100,000 or more (Stop the Violence, 1994). From 1984 to 1994, the homicide rate for adolescents doubled (Elliot, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998) and in 1992 homicide

was identified as the third leading cause of death for children 10-14 years old. (Fingerhut, 1992). Violence prevention suddenly became a national priority in education (Bodine & Crawford, 1998). At the same time that some schools hired security guards, installed metal detectors and began to implement stricter disciplinary practices, others turned to conflict resolution education as a primary prevention strategy. When federal funds were made available to initiate more conflict resolution training for educators, the field was in a position to blossom, and, indeed, it has. The National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME)* estimated that there were approximately 50 school-based conflict resolution programs in 1984, the year of the organization's inception (Girard, 1995). By 1992 there were approximately 2,000 programs in U.S. public schools, and by 1994 somewhere between 5,000 and 8,000 (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). In 1998, the National Institute for Dispute Resolution (NIDR) estimated that there were 8,500 programs in schools, which would be approximately 10% of public schools in the United States (Bodine & Crawford, 1998). In 2000, the Conflict Resolution Education Network (CREnet) estimated that number at 10 – 15% (Pritchard, 2000).

Among conflict resolution programs peer mediation is the most popular (Baker, French, Trujillo, & Wing, 2000; Cohen, 2001; Deutsch & Coleman, 2000; Pritchard, 2000). Peer mediation programs train the whole student body or a select group of students in mediation, a structured problem-solving process that aids disputants in working towards a mutually satisfactory agreement to a conflict. Trained students then mediate for their peers as conflicts arise in the classroom, playground or overall school

* In 1994, NAME merged with the National Institute for Dispute Resolution (NIDR) to become the Conflict Resolution in Education Network, or CREnet. In September 2001, CREnet merged with the Academy of Family Mediators (AFM) and the Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR) to become the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR).

environment. Research on the benefits that have been associated with peer mediation programs tends to focus firstly, on the positive effects programs have on student mediators and secondly, on school-wide benefits.

According to Schrumpf, Crawford, and Bodine (1997) the experience of being a mediator fosters student self-esteem, self-discipline, and leadership ability. The experience of being a mediator has also been correlated with increases in peer status, responsible behavior, academic improvement, and better resolution of problems at school and at home (Gentry & Benenson, 1993; Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Singh, 1995; Thompson, 1996). Peer mediators are thought to develop positive problem-solving and communication skills as well as the ability to transfer the use of these skills to their relationships at home and in the community (Gentry & Benenson, 1993; Johnson & Johnson, Dudley, Ward, and Magnuson, 1995; Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Singh, 1995). In their 1996 review of the research, Johnson and Johnson conclude from many different studies on the subject that “the ability to resolve conflicts constructively tends to increase psychological health, self-esteem, self-regulation, and resilience” (p. 490).

At the school-wide level there is evidence that mediation programs can reduce disciplinary referrals, detentions, and suspensions (Coleman & Deutsch, 2000; Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Landry, & Miller, 2000; Jones, T., 1998; Schrumpf, Crawford, & Bodine, 1997) and improve student and teacher perceptions of the school climate (Crary, 1992; Jones, 1998; Singh, 1995). While school climate is a construct that has tended to be inconsistently defined and measured in the literature (Jones, Johnson, & Lieber, 2000), many researchers have asserted that providing students with a framework and a venue for

solving conflicts at school can make classrooms more productive and peaceful (Benson & Benson, 1993; Deutsch, 1994).

Most of the school-wide benefits associated with peer mediation listed above are also associated with conflict resolution education in general (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Peer mediation's dramatic popularity, however, is probably associated with a few of its more unique qualities. Firstly, and arguably most significantly, peer mediation creates a context in which students can practice and appreciate their new skills while improving school atmosphere. As Cohen (2001) put it, "peer mediation encourages students to apply conflict resolution skills when it matters most – when they are in conflict." If students do not have the opportunity to practice the skills they are learning, they are far less likely to be able to use them in the heat of the moment (Cohen, 2001, Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Singh, 1995). Peer mediation programs are also popular because, depending on how they are structured, they can be the easiest and least expensive programs to implement (Coleman & Deutsch, 2000).

There are different ways of structuring peer mediation programs. While some programs are offered to students on a school-wide basis – all students learn and practice conflict resolution and serve the school as mediators -, other programs train only 20-30 students to mediate for the school. Johnson and Johnson (1994) distinguished between the former, "school-wide", and the latter, "cadre programs." Some cadre programs are accompanied by school-wide curricula that teach principles and skills of conflict resolution at each grade level, but many exist as the only form of conflict resolution education in the school. Thus, there are significant differences in the degree of comprehensiveness among peer mediation programs (Johnson & Johnson, 1996;

Schrumpf et al., 1997). School-wide conflict resolution curricula accompanied by school-wide peer mediation programs would be the most comprehensive, school-wide conflict resolution curricula accompanied by a cadre peer mediation program would be somewhat less comprehensive, and cadre programs that exist without other forms of conflict resolution education would not be comprehensive at all. Even within these categories there are differences in comprehensiveness associated with such things as staff training, time devoted to curricula, community involvement, and the extent to which conflict resolution principles guide the general operation of the school.

The effectiveness of various kinds of conflict resolution programs, especially peer mediation, was questioned soon after they became popular. Webster (1993) has been cited widely for questioning the broad implementation of programs that had yet to be evaluated (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Sandy, Bailey, & Sloane-Akwana, 2000). Johnson and Johnson (1996) agreed that the anecdotal claims of conflict resolution and peer mediation's effectiveness had to be grounded with empirical and "methodologically sound" research to ensure their long-term viability. Trends come and go in education. Unless new programs can demonstrate dramatic benefits to schools and particularly an increase in student achievement, they tend to fall by the wayside (Gerber, 1999; Johnson & Johnson, 1996, 2001). While it is notoriously difficult to conduct highly controlled research in school settings, many in the field have noted that evaluation studies are crucial to the development and maintenance of effective programs (Carruthers, Sweeney, Kmita, & Harris 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Kmita 2000). Over the last decade, scholars and educators have contributed to a growing body of research primarily documenting effectiveness of programs, overall benefits of programs, as well as best

practices and elements of successful programs. While the literature is far from comprehensive and exhibits a broad range of thoroughness and quality, there is also widespread agreement on certain topics.

The most vocal professionals in the field have consistently equated best practices with those that are most comprehensive. Johnson and Johnson's Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers Program (TSPP), Bodine and Crawford's "peaceable schools", and Morton Deutsch's "systems approach" all recommend making conflict resolution principles and practices integral to classroom interactions and school culture in general. There are many arguments for comprehensive programs that are well documented in the research conducted over the last ten years.

First of all, many researchers have agreed that peer mediation programs need to be accompanied by a substantial and developmentally appropriate conflict resolution curriculum to be most effective (Crawford & Bodine, 2001; Coleman & Deutsch, 2000; Fitzell, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Jones, P. L., 1998; Schrupf et al., 1997; Singh 1995). Carruthers, Carruthers, Day-Vines, Bostick, and Watson (1996) asserted that while peer mediation programs have attracted nationwide attention, conflict resolution curricula "have the greater potential to effect lasting change in students' and staff members' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors" (p. 368). Johnson and Johnson (1995) contrast conflict resolution projects with violence prevention projects. If a program targets certain behaviors without providing a cooperative context and an understanding and appreciation for conflict in all students and staff members, it sets itself up for failure.

Secondly, there is widespread agreement that it is important for all students to have an opportunity to act as mediators. Even when cadre peer mediation programs exist

alongside school-wide conflict resolution training, many students miss the important practice and service opportunities that push their internalization and appreciation of mediation skills to another level. When all students are given the training and opportunity to apply their skills at school, chances are much higher that they will be able to use them in other life contexts. Singh (1995) and Johnson and Johnson (1996) have emphasized the extent to which students need to overlearn skills to be able to use them in the heat of the moment. This can be most easily achieved through a formal practice of mediation, in which students are using their skills to help others in real life situations. Johnson and Johnson (1995) have argued that a few peer mediators with limited training are not likely to decrease the severity and frequency of conflicts in a school. They have strongly encouraged schools to allow all students to be trained in mediation and to apply their skills as school mediators. Casella has argued that if it is the mediation training and not having a conflict mediated that leads to decreased incidences of violence, the most effective strategy for violence prevention would be to train all students (2000).

In contrast, the justification for cadre type programs is that both the experience of being a mediator as well as the experience of going through mediation has positive and lasting effects that can spread throughout the school and community (Crary, 1992). While they agreed with Johnson and Johnson that an ideal program would involve all students acting as mediators, Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, and Modest (1996) recognized the contributions that smaller programs make and asserted that involving all students would only be possible in a “very mature program.” The Comprehensive Peer Mediation Evaluation Project (CPMEP) investigated the different effects of cadre and whole school programs on students (Jones, T. S., 1998). While the study confirmed other

research indicating that school-wide programs are more effective for achieving maximum benefits to the school, it also showed that cadre programs can result in better outcomes for individuals (Jones, T. S., 1998).

Some of the other traits associated with successful programs are strong administrator leadership, whole staff training, and behavior management practice based on conflict resolution theories. Administrator leadership is central to being able to overcome any attitudinal or structural resistance to a new school program like peer mediation (Cohen, 2001). Daunic et al. (2000) described the pressure on many school administrators to develop both antiviolence programs and constant academic improvements in their schools. Administrators need to be committed and responsible to the ideas behind conflict resolution and peer mediation programs by investigating the effort and resources necessary to creating a truly effective program. In general, the comprehensive efforts suggested for making programs most successful are highly dependent on strong administrator leadership (Cohen, 2001; Girard, 1995; Jones, P. L., 1998; Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, & Modest, 1996; National Association for Mediation in Education [NAME], 1994; Pritchard, 2000; Schruppf et al., 1997; Singh, 1995).

In a school-wide program with more comprehensive goals, teacher training becomes nearly as important as student training. “Without sufficient training to address teachers’ own behavior, there is the danger that the adults’ words will not match their actions.” (Girard, 1995, p. 2) Because modeling is such a powerful teaching tool, it is very important that teachers do model positive conflict negotiation and mediation skills

(Bodine, Crawford, & Shrumpf, 1994; Deutsch & Raider, 2000; Harris, 2000; Singh, 1995) Coleman and Deutsch (2000) have explained that training all school staff:

...can help institutionalize the changes through adult modeling of the attitudes and behaviors desired for the students; demonstrates the value of such approaches; and encourages the development of new language, norms, and expectations around conflict and conflict management throughout the school community.

In their “systems approach” they have also encouraged broader community training and recruiting parents, caregivers, clergy, local police, and other community members to take part in planning school efforts.

Teacher training can help overcome any skepticism and resistance that teachers may experience when faced with a new and demanding project. (Bell, 2000) Singh quotes Cameron and Depuis (1991) that “it takes students (an estimated) two years to accept peer mediation as a dispute resolution process and teachers five years.” While teacher “buy-in” is not always easy to achieve (Jones, P. L., 1998), it is crucial to the success of a program for logistical as well as pedagogical reasons.

Johnson and Johnson (1995) have written extensively on the importance of establishing a cooperative context in which to learn and practice conflict resolution. They contrast a cooperative learning environment, in which students have a stake in maintaining a positive relationship with others, with a competitive environment, in which students strive to outdo their opponents. In their Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers Program (TSPP), trainers instruct teachers, administrators, and students on how to establish cooperative environment (Fitch & Marshall, 1999). Johnson and Johnson have also looked at more academic applications of conflict resolution such as creative controversy, an assignment in which pairs of students take turns exploring and debating

an issue from different perspectives (1995). In addition to giving students rich experience in skills fundamental to mediation and negotiation such as perspective-taking, creative controversy has also resulted in increases in student achievement, critical thinking, higher-level reasoning, and intrinsic motivation (Johnson & Johnson, 1979, 1992).

Research has begun to look at what kind of teacher training is most efficient and effective. According to Kmitta, Brown, Chappell, Speigler and Wiley (2000), training is most effective when it is voluntary and when it gives at least as much time to teaching teachers how to mediate their own conflicts as to teaching teachers how to train student in mediation.

While the importance of school-wide teacher training is well documented, small cadre programs are often coordinated by an individual person who may or may not have gone through training herself. School counselors have the flexibility to train and monitor student mediators during the school day, and many tend to integrate proactive, student-centered, skill-building interventions such as peer mediation into their overall guidance plans (Humphries, 1999; Thompson, 1996). For these reasons, school counselors are often asked to implement programs or will initiate them on their own.

If a school seeks to promote mediation and negotiation skills among students, not only does it need to train teachers in these skills, but also to replace school and classroom behavior management practices based on punishment with practices that reflect principles of conflict resolution. Crawford and Bodine (2001) emphasized the difference between external and internal methods of controlling behavior. External methods are coercive and inflict punishment on students who are caught behaving in an undesirable way. Internal methods encourage responsible behavior in students by encouraging them to evaluate the

logical consequences of their behavior. This presupposes a cooperative context in which all students have something to gain by participating positively in a group (Bodine et al., 1994). A basic assumption of the Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers Program is that the “norms, values, and culture of a school should promote and support the use of the negotiation and mediation procedures” (Johnson & Johnson, 2001, p.6). This implies that the same dispute resolution procedures are used when teachers and students have conflicts as when conflicts arise between students.

Paul Jones (1998) recommends that teachers and administrators replace “discipline based on rewards and punishments with teaching values.” Punishment based discipline gives children the message that they can do whatever they like as long as they are not caught. If school rules are based on values, however, following the rules means doing one’s part because he or she cares about others and maintaining relationships with them.

In 2000 CREnet organized a research symposium sponsored by the United States Department of Education. Educators, practitioners and researchers were invited to come together to examine the existing research, to identify current research needs, and to develop a publication that would make this information accessible to the field (Jones, T. S., 2000). The result was a collection of papers entitled Does it Work? The Case for Conflict Resolution Education in our Nation’s Schools. It is obvious from the title that the collection advocates for conflict resolution education and concludes that it does, indeed, “work”. It emphasizes comprehensive programming and devotes a whole chapter to institutionalization of programming. In the conclusion of the document Danial Kmitta observes: “Throughout this volume, educators, researchers, and practitioners emphasize

the futility of research if we cannot find a way to make conflict resolution education a more permanent component of the educational institution” (p. 146). In other words, the research can show what a successful conflict resolution program looks like. It can also describe the preconditions for a successful program: time, money, support, enthusiasm, on-going, quality training and long-term commitment. As long as these preconditions are not available to most schools on a consistent basis, putting research into practice is difficult if not entirely unrealistic.

The Does it Work? collection is significant because it looks to the experienced voices of practitioners without compromising the vision of well-considered, well-funded research projects. It does not solve the dilemma of how to make comprehensive programs accessible to more schools but at least it recognizes the issue. More research could be done, however, to look at what small-scale programs are able to achieve and how they could be implemented to maximize their success and to increase their longevity in schools that are not yet prepared to implement comprehensive programs.

Chapter 3

METHOD

Participants

Recruitment. The original proposal for this study involved interviewing six middle school counselors who had been coordinators of their schools' peer mediation programs for at least two years. Because the study is a qualitative one, descriptive and exploratory in nature, it was important to find participants who were able and willing to give detailed information about their schools' programs and about their own experiences with and perspectives on peer mediation programs. Diversity in schools represented as well as diversity in participant background were also priorities in selection. In order to recruit a diverse group of participants, the search was focused on middle schools in a three county area of North Carolina, each county having a very distinct school system facing different challenges and having access to different resources.

As it turned out, recruitment was difficult. In the two smaller counties, all middle schools were called to find out if they currently had a peer mediation program. In one county, one program that had existed had been abandoned and two out of three existing programs were brand new. In another county, three out of the four programs listed on the county's web-site no longer existed, although a new unlisted program had just begun. A senior guidance director in the largest county gave the researcher a list of counselors who included peer mediation in their yearly developmental guidance programs. From this list it appeared that nine middle schools in the county had current programs. Upon contacting each counselor, it turned out that four of the programs no longer existed and one program was coordinated by a social studies teacher. That left four programs in the county

coordinated by middle school counselors. Two counselors felt too overwhelmed in the last months of the school year to participate in the study.

This left a total of four participants in the three county area who had been coordinating programs for at least two years. Although she had only been coordinating her program for one year, an additional counselor was interviewed to add another perspective. This recruitment process was informative in and of itself as it demonstrated how quickly programs seem to come in and out of existence.

The five counselors who became the study sample were a relatively diverse group. Although all five were women, they differed in age, experience, ethnic background, as well as school and program conditions.

Participants and their Programs.

Dana. Dana is an Anglo-American woman in her mid-30s. She has been a school counselor for 6 years and has been at her current school for 4 years. She has coordinated two peer mediation programs for a total of 5 ½ years. Dana was exposed to conflict resolution education through a national conference sponsored by SPIDR and CREnet. She has also attended several training workshops.

Dana's school, Preston Middle, is located in a small university town, which is well known for the quality of its schools. Her school of 804 students has a student-teacher ratio of 13.2 to 1, has 3 school counselors, and has 15% of students enrolled in the Free and Reduced Lunch program. The student body is roughly 66% Anglo-American, 17% African-American, 14% Asian-American and 2% Latino.

Dana's program is 4 years old. Several years before Dana began at Preston, the school district required that conflict resolution be taught in its schools. Preston started a

peer mediation program, but it did not work well and was abandoned. When Dana came to the school, she worked hard to sell the program to the teachers and administration. Today the principal and teachers are generally very supportive. There are thirteen trained staff members on the mediation team, including Dana. Thirty student mediators represent the school each year and mediate roughly 50 conflicts during that time. Mediators are selected by peer and teacher recommendation and once selected are allowed to continue as mediators throughout the rest of their years at the school. Each year, there is one full day of training (6 hours) and mini-courses designed for more intensive practice of specific skills. The program offers basic training for new mediators and advanced training for returning mediators. Mediators fundraise each year for special events. One year they attended the National Peacemakers Conference in Arizona. Last year they visited a mediation team in Washington D.C. to compare notes and learn from other mediators. This year the team from D.C. is coming to visit them. Dana says the program's main objectives are to "teach kids to actively listen and to help others come up with their own answers." The program is evaluated by evidence that it is commonly used, but not always by the same students. If the same referrals are made over and over again, that would be a sign that mediation was not working. In addition to this, Dana surveys her returning mediators each year to find out what they think is effective or not effective about the program.

Adele. Adele is an African-American woman in her mid-30s. She has been a school counselor for nine years and has been at Kingsbridge Middle School for seven years. When the peer mediation program began at her school six years ago, the school had designated drop-out prevention money for a staff member to act as a program

coordinator. The next year that position was cut and Adele took over the program. She had been involved with a program at her first job as an elementary school counselor, but did not have any formal training in conflict resolution education or mediation.

Kingsbridge is an International Baccalaureate magnet school in a mid-size city. The school of 412 students has a student-teacher ratio of 11.8 to 1 and has only one school counselor. Twenty-eight percent of students receive Free or Reduced Lunch. The student body is roughly 71% African-American, 25% Anglo-American, 2% Asian-American and 2% Latino.

Adele's program has a total of 30 mediators each year. New mediators are trained when former mediators leave the school or choose to stop mediating. Each year Adele makes an announcement that anyone interested in becoming a mediator should pick up an application form in her office. She interviews all students who hand in applications. She screens applicants for interest and responsibility level and tries to select a diverse group of students. Mediators receive one day of training from veteran high school mediators. Adele has no one to help her with the program, which often means asking her students to take on more responsibility. Students mediate about 30 conflicts a year. Their biggest complaint is that they do not have more cases to mediate. Adele says that though the principal and faculty are extremely supportive, they are not very involved with the program. She is not sure that the principal really understands what the program is all about even though the principal likes the idea of having it. The teachers at Kingsbridge are very supportive, but they do not have to make any sacrifices for the program, especially since there are so few mediations that happen each year. Adele's main objectives for the program have been firstly: keeping it going, and secondly: giving her

students the opportunity to develop and practice their leadership skills. The program is evaluated based on what students have to say about it: If they say it works, then it does. If they leave a session and the conflict is solved, that is success.

Sue. Sue is an Anglo-American woman in her early 50s. She has been a school counselor for 20 years and has worked at Erhart Middle School for 18 years. She has been working with the peer mediation program at her school for almost 10 years and has been coordinating it for the last four or five years. She began her career as an advancement counselor working with at-risk students in the early 80s.

Erhart Middle is located in a wealthy suburban town near a large city. Some of its students are bussed in from housing projects in the city. It has approximately 1,000 students, one counselor for each grade level, and a student-teacher ratio of 14 to 1. The student body is 67% Anglo-American, 22% African-American, 6% Latino, and 5% Asian-American. 27% of students receive Free or Reduced Lunch.

In the early 1990's her school system began pushing conflict resolution and peer mediation programs throughout the district. They offered a 3-day training, which Sue attended. A year or two later, the principal created a position which would allow one staff member three periods a day to devote to a peer mediation program in the school.

Although the rest of the faculty was not formally trained, they did receive substantial staff development about the program and about conflict resolution in general. Over the years they have been very supportive. Twenty students participate in the program as mediators each year, and in that time they mediate roughly 90 conflicts. New mediators are generally recruited from the sixth grade. Each year new and returning mediators receive a full day of training (6 hours) and then practice skills during the half-hour after

lunch, student ER time (Enrichment and Remediation). Sue coordinates the program with help from the school resource officer and the ISS-teacher. Sue says the main objective of the program is “to have the kids solve their own conflicts... instead of going to ISS.” She evaluates the program’s success by monitoring how many students are using the program and what kinds of conflicts are happening in the school. They look to see that fewer students are getting into the serious conflicts that can turn into disciplinary issues.

Libby. Libby is a 30-year-old Anglo-American woman. She began her career as a school counselor at Lansing Middle School 3½ years ago. Before that, during her internship, she worked closely with a middle school counselor in the same county who coordinated a peer mediation program. She learned a lot from that experience and thought her school could benefit significantly from such a program.

Lansing Middle is located in an inner-city neighborhood. It has about 900 students and 3 counselors. The student-teacher ratio is 13.2 to 1, and 65% of its students receive Free and Reduced Lunch. The student body is roughly 57% Anglo-American, 29% African-American, 13% Asian-American, and 1% Latino.

Libby started the program at Lansing three years ago. Each year she has worked hard to win the support and enthusiasm of the school’s administrators and teachers, and each year she has, indeed, won over more of the school faculty. More teachers refer more conflicts each year. When she began the program, she trained 12 sixth graders to be mediators for the sixth grade. The next year she kept on the mediators from the previous year who were now seventh graders and trained 12 new sixth graders. This past year was the first year of the program during which there were trained mediators in all three grades. To become mediators, students have to submit two referrals from peers and two

referrals from teachers, fill out an application, have parent permission, and maintain an average of C or above. Students also have to go through Libby's classroom guidance session on conflict resolution. Once selected, students go through a two-day (12 hour) training session and then practice skills. Libby monitors their mediations until they have mastered the process and the basic skills (eye contact, communication, listening, etc.). She says her students mediate roughly three conflicts a week. Her program's main objectives are to teach leadership skills and conflict resolution skills to the mediators and to help students establish positive relationships with peers throughout the school. In addition to evaluating mediator skills, she sends out a yearly evaluation form to the staff to get their feedback on the program.

Cathy. Cathy is an Anglo-American woman in her mid-20's, who has been a school counselor for two years at Staunton Middle School. This was her first year coordinating a peer mediation program and she had no prior experience or training in mediation.

Staunton is in a rural area, but is not far from two mid-size cities as well as a small town, which serves as the county seat. It has 712 students, a student-teacher ratio of 14 to 1, and two school counselors. Twenty-seven percent of students receive Free or Reduced Lunch. The student body is approximately 70% Anglo-American, 28% African-American, 2% Latino, and 1% Asian-American.

Cathy was excited about starting a peer mediation program this year. Although she had read about peer mediation programs, she did not have prior experience with mediation herself. The school had had a program in the past that was largely supported by the county dispute settlement center. Cathy turned to the dispute settlement center again

when looking to rekindle the project. She could not come up with all the money that the center had originally asked for, but had been awarded a few hundred dollars in school system grant money. The center agreed to work with the school for this amount of money. The center's school coordinator trained 12 students once a week for one hour from August till December. In January, the students were supposed to begin mediating, but the whole schedule for the school changed and the "Acceleration" time on Fridays during which the students were going to mediate was eliminated. It took a while for teachers to agree to have students taken out of their classes for mediation, but there was no other way for students to mediate. This year Cathy's students did 20 mediations. She said that the program's main objectives were to: introduce students to options for solving problems, teaching communication skills, generating alternatives to fighting, and giving mediators a solid foundation from which to understand the purpose of mediation and conflict resolution. This year the struggle to keep the program going was so overwhelming that Cathy and her co-worker did not have time to follow any evaluation procedure.

Instrument

A questionnaire was designed to elicit general background information regarding each school's demographics, the age and size of program, funding, program goals and design, student and staff training, evaluation procedures, and participant/counselor background (Appendix A). In addition to this, a semi-structured interview (Appendix B) was designed to provoke counselors' practical ideas and opinions regarding traits of programs that are highly recommended in the professional literature. Firstly, it asked participants to comment on five potential benefits of peer mediation programs commonly

found in the research, namely, peer mediation's ability to contribute to: (a) the prevention of school violence, (b) the reduction of bullying and teasing, (c) improvement of student self-esteem, (d) improvement in academic achievement, and (e) improvement in school and classroom atmosphere. Secondly, it asked participants to estimate the importance of each of five traits that have been described as central to a successful program in the research, namely: (a) strong administrator leadership, (b) teacher/staff/administrator training, (c) behavior management systems in accordance with conflict resolution theory, (d) school-wide conflict resolution curriculum, and (e) practice opportunities for all students.

Procedure

Data collection. Counselors were contacted via telephone and e-mail to establish their appropriateness for the study, their willingness to participate in it, and finally a date for an interview. At the beginning of the interview with each participant, the informed consent form was reviewed (Appendix C). In particular, the general premise of the study, procedure, confidentiality and follow-up contact information were explained. Aware that in the final section of the interview they would be asked to compare their own programs to what might be considered an "ideal program", the researcher explained that the purpose of the interview was to find out what was most important to a program in her experience, and that what was happening in the program was more important for the study than what was not happening. Once the participant signed the consent form, the tape recorder was turned on and the remainder of the meeting was recorded.

Before beginning with the semi-structured interview, the participant completed the questionnaire, orally or in writing. After this was completed, the interview began. As

explained above, the interview was designed to provoke counselors to discuss their experiences and opinions in relation to common findings in the professional literature firstly, regarding benefits of programs, and secondly, regarding traits important to successful programs.

Data analysis. Each interview was partially transcribed. Names of participants and their schools were changed to protect confidentiality and anonymity. The main themes of each interview were summarized based on the tape recording and transcriptions. These were then sent electronically to each participant in order to verify that they had been understood accurately. At the same time, each interview was analyzed and coded with particular attention to (a) how each supported, modified, or negated common findings in the literature and (b) how each differed from or agreed with the other interviews. The coding process began with participants' responses to the specific questions contained on the interview instrument, which was fairly specific (i.e. To what extent do you think peer mediation programs contribute to the prevention of school violence?). Similar responses to questions were written up in general terms and more detailed or unique responses were highlighted as quotations or paraphrases. After the interviews had been coded in light of the original questions, they were analyzed again for themes that were stressed very strongly by a participant or stressed by more than one participant.

Audit Process

To confirm that the results of the study were credible and not due to researcher bias, an auditor was asked to review the informed consent forms that each participant had signed, the questionnaires that the participants had filled out, and the recorded interview material on tape and as transcriptions. The auditor determined that the results did come from the data and that any inferences made were logical and not constructions of researcher bias (Appendix D).

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Benefits of Peer Mediation Programs

Questions 1 and 2 of the survey asked the counselors (a) to what extent they believed that peer mediation programs were effective strategies for preventing school violence, decreasing bullying and teasing, improving school and classroom atmosphere, improving individual students' academic performance, and improving student self-esteem; and (b) to what extent they believed their programs accomplished these.

Cathy did not discuss each individual item, but rather all five together. She felt strongly that peer mediation programs should be able to make a positive impact on all of these points and explained that it was her conviction about this that inspired her to initiate a program for her school. Because of the difficulties she had acquiring the support she needed to implement the program in a more successful way, her mediators did very few mediations this year. For this reason, she did not think that her program could lay claim to having had much of an impact on anything besides the lives of the mediators who went through the training. The four other participants' responses are presented below.

Prevents school violence and decreases bullying and teasing. Dana, Adele, Sue and Libby agreed that peer mediation programs had a positive impact on both preventing school violence and decreasing bullying and teasing. Each of them emphasized that peer mediation taught kids to “talk, not fight”, and that this kept bullying and teasing from escalating into something more violent. Libby said that most of her school's referrals came from bullying and teasing issues and that she felt peer mediation was an effective strategy for addressing these issues. She said she was not sure if this particular

opportunity, which helped some kids, had a school-wide impact. That was her one reservation about saying that programs, including her own, could prevent school violence.

Sue and Dana made distinctions between the majority of the students who go through mediation and exceptionally aggressive students. Sue said, “Most of the mediation sessions I don’t really consider violent. Most of them are hurt feelings and things like that.... If a student is your really aggressive type child, I don’t know if it effects that, but it does help basic fighting.” Dana explained that peer mediation can be a good way to deal with bullies: “you can teach them too, to talk, not fight.” But she also made the point that the success of this strategy depends on the bullier: “Usually bullies are dealing with deeper self-esteem issues or problems at home. The aggression that comes from more personal issues aren’t really addressed by peer mediation.”

Adele emphasized that bullying and teasing are “just natural in a middle school environment.” She said she would be worried about her students if they didn’t tease each other. At the same time though, people’s feelings do get hurt and if you play around with someone on the wrong day fights often ensue. “That’s where peer mediation comes in and prevents what could happen if there wasn’t a place to deal with these things.”

Improves school and classroom atmosphere. Three of the four counselors felt strongly that their programs did contribute to the improvement of school and classroom atmosphere. Dana explained that “if you teach people to work out their conflicts productively, that’s going to make things better in the classroom.” She believed that her program did, indeed, benefit the school in this way. Libby also made a strong statement: “I definitely think [our program] has improved school and classroom atmosphere.” She

went on to explain what a large role race and diversity issues seemed to play in students' lives at school. She believes her peer mediation program has helped many students learn to respect each other's differences.

Adele described peer mediation as a strategy for lowering the general stress level of the atmosphere in the classroom and in the school in general. "Students know they can depend on something to help them get through a situation they're dealing with at school; there's support for them. And I think that makes them feel their atmosphere is safer... Kids have a lot of stress... it's just not the stress we have, like bills and car problems, that kind of thing. They have stress and if we can alleviate some of their stress, it is always going to improve classroom atmosphere."

Improves individual students' academic performance. Libby and Sue did not see any correlation between peer mediation programs and student academic performance. Dana and Adele spoke solely about mediators. They explained that their mediators were inspired to work harder in school because they had to get decent grades to stay in the program. While both counselors described the importance of keeping a diversity of students on the mediation team, "not just straight-A students", their programs also insist on mediators being responsible about making up any work they miss in the classroom and have consequences for grades slipping below C. In Dana's program, students are on probation from mediation for D's and are dismissed from the program for F's. In Adele's and Libby's programs, students must maintain at least a C average.

Improves student self-esteem. All counselors stressed that the program did not improve student self-esteem on a school-wide basis, but did have a very positive effect on the mediators' self-esteem. Dana discussed the powerful effects of being selected to be a

mediator in the first place: “It is an honor to say that you were picked by your teachers and fellow classmates... to know ‘I was chosen for my skills and my honesty.’” She also described how mediators begin to use their new skills in their own conflicts with friends and at home. She said that she hears funny stories from parents about how her students will communicate with them in new ways. Sometimes their efforts are successful and sometimes they are not. “But when it does work, it effects their self-esteem.”

Adele’s emphasis was on the social aspect of peer mediation and on being a role model to other students. “Because they are part of something that is obviously going to boost their self-esteem.” In addition, having the opportunity to show their leadership skills and be recognized by their peers for them improves the way mediators feel about themselves.

Similarly, Sue described the experience of being a peer mediator as one that “enhances [mediators] self-esteem because they take ownership of problems” happening at their school. They have a role that is valued and a skill to contribute. This makes them feel different about who they are at school.

Most Significant Result of Program

When asked about the most significant result of their programs, three of the participants focused on how the program helped mediators. Adele and Sue focused on the leadership skills that the mediators develop and how it helped students blossom, even those who were not otherwise excelling in school. “If we don’t do anything else but touch the lives of a few mediators, that is worthwhile,” Sue explained. Because of the logistical difficulties her program faced this year, Cathy did not think that her program was able to influence the whole student body. “Hopefully the kids learned some new strategies for

solving conflicts for themselves personally... I don't think enough kids in the student body saw this as an option for resolving their conflicts. So I think it was more of a personal gain for the mediators than for the other students or teachers.”

Dana was the only participant who focused on a more general school-wide achievement her program has made: creating opportunities for kids to help kids. This in itself represents a shift of focus in schools that is empowering and productive for students as well as teachers.

Wish List: Changes to Program

Questions 4 and 5 asked what the counselors would change about their programs if they could and what they would need to be able to make those changes. All of the counselors wished for more time to be able to give to one aspect of the program or another. Dana has wanted to implement a school-wide conflict resolution curriculum for years. When asked what she would need to finally be able to do so, she explained: “Time, and that is the piece that always falls through.” Sue would like someone to keep records on the program. Ever since her program lost their paid coordinator, no one has had enough time to document the activities of the program. She emphasized that it was money that kept the school from being able to hire someone to focus solely or primarily on the program that kept this from happening. Cathy wished to be able to spend more time working consistently with the mediators throughout the year. “We have to drop everything that we're doing to do what the administrators think is important, or the county. There are different things that we have to do for different people, so it is hard to be consistent with the program when all these things factor in.” In order to have more

time on a more consistent basis Cathy felt she would need far greater administrator support.

Adele wished for either more time to give to the program or an assistant to help her. “To have more time to do it would mean to cut out some of my duties... Other duties like testing coordinator, or records, or SAP (Student Assistance Program), or 504s, or registration, or five year plans, ... or any of that, you know... I could go on and on. Or give me an assistant. Or give me someone else to help. But you know they all have just as much. But, hey, that’s education. You do what you can, with what you have.” She suggested that inadequate funding was what kept everyone in public education overburdened and this is what would have to change for her to be able to focus more time on the program.

Libby’s main desire was to have more faculty involvement with the program. In particular she thought that it would be nice if the seventh and eighth grade counselors took responsibility for following-up with the seventh and eighth grade mediators. As it stands, Libby trains the sixth grade mediators and does all the work with the experienced mediators as well. “I would need administrator support to encourage people to get involved. We do have a budget for guidance. So we’ll have a budget next year for peer mediation. So things are getting better.”

Cathy also mentioned a desire to have more training for students, teachers, and counselors, and more resources overall (books, videos, pamphlets, etc.). In order to have this, she thought she would need more administrator support and money.

Important Traits for Successful Programs

Questions 6 and 7 asked counselors to evaluate the importance of each of five traits to the success of peer mediation programs generally, and to explain how those traits described their own program.

Teacher and administrator training. Three of the counselors, Adele, Dana, and Sue, felt that it was important for teachers to be aware of the peer mediation programs at their schools and to have a clear understanding of what they are about. These three did not think that faculty training was necessary to providing this awareness and understanding. Libby felt that training was very important to the success of a program, but if training wasn't possible, it was essential to have teacher awareness and understanding. Cathy felt that teacher and administrator training was essential to a successful program.

Dana stressed the importance of staff "buy-in" and described the work she had done to get it. She explained that just before she'd come to her school, the district had said "Oh, here! Do conflict resolution training with your kids!" The teachers did not know what to do. They started a peer mediation program and it was not working. Dana explained: "Nobody was buying-into it. I had started a program in Maryland. I brought the program here. Peer mediation is just a part of conflict resolution. It doesn't work if people don't buy into it. So before I came in and said that we were going to have this program, I did a lot of talking and a lot hype to get people to buy into the idea. Once the staff bought into it, we started the program." In her school, there are 13 trained staff members on the peer mediation team. Not all teachers in the school have been trained, but all teachers, new and returning, are introduced to the program at the beginning of

each school year. As some staff leave the mediation team and others join, the number of staff at the school who have been trained grows.

Sue's program has been around the longest of any of the programs in this study. It enjoys support from an administrator who believes it should be an integral part of the school's mission to give students the skills they need to solve conflicts. When the program began nine years ago, teachers learned about it through staff development meetings at the start of the school year. This introduction is no longer made on a yearly basis, which means that while most teachers are very supportive of the program, newer teachers might not even know that it exists. When discussing this, Sue said: "There has been so much turnover, it is probably time to do that [introduction] again."

Although when asked how important teacher and administrator training was, Adele also stressed that awareness was more important than training, her responses over the course of the interview seemed to indicate that she thought that the whole school should share basic principles of conflict resolution. "Teachers must be aware of the program and what it is all about. I mean, how can you be in education if you're not [aware of peer mediation and conflict resolution]. There should be principles that people use in classrooms and all, but I don't really know if that happens."

Libby does a review of her program each year for the teachers at her school. Not only does she explain how it works, but she teaches listening skills and does a workshop on diversity training, which includes material from a conflict resolution curriculum. When she began her program three years ago, she had to work very hard to get support from teachers. "Because they hadn't seen the validity in it, what's good in it, I had to

show them,” she said. “Some teachers are at about 100% now and there are some that don’t really care. But it’s getting better.”

Cathy had made several requests of the principal to allot a small amount of time and money to include a teacher workshop on conflict resolution and peer mediation on a staff development workday. While the principal agreed to it, she never followed through. Cathy had hoped that training would help generate support for the peer mediation program, but also help to generate a broader interest in teaching conflict resolution throughout the school.

Opportunities for all students to practice as mediators. Dana, Adele, and Libby felt that it was somewhat important to make the experience of being a mediator available to all students, but it did not seem to be a priority to any of them. Dana said that if it were possible to train all students, then it would be important to give them practice opportunities, but this is not how her program is set up. Adele did not feel that all students would benefit from going through training and practicing as a mediator. “Some students who have a lot of parent involvement might not really need [the skills and experience] as much as others.” At Libby’s school, all sixth graders are introduced to conflict resolution and are given opportunities to practice mediation and negotiation skills in a quarter long class. While she thinks that all students should have conflict resolution training, she does not think that all students need to have the experience of being a mediator.

Sue said that it is very important to have all students in school practice mediation. “I wish we could do it,” she said. As at Libby’s school, students at her school do get a few opportunities to practice in context of the violence prevention program, Second Step,

but these classroom opportunities are few and do not receive the legitimacy and importance that school mediation does.

Cathy thought that it was very important to allow all students to have the opportunity to serve their school as mediators.

Conflict resolution curriculum. All participants agreed on the importance of having a comprehensive conflict resolution curriculum to accompany a peer mediation program. Dana said that it was important, but very difficult to realize this because it demands so much time. Although it has been a wish of hers to implement such a program for many years “that is always the piece that doesn’t get done.” In contrast to this, the peer mediation program can exist because it is “doable.” Lansing Middle and Erhart Middle are in the same school system and both have violence prevention curricula in place. Libby’s school uses the Get Real about Violence curriculum and Sue’s school uses Second Step. Libby said that a conflict resolution curriculum is essential to the success of a peer mediation program and that her school “sort of” offers this. By this, she meant that Lansing uses a violence prevention program which includes some themes akin to conflict resolution. Sue did not distinguish between Erhart’s violence prevention curriculum and a curriculum more specific to conflict resolution.

Administrator leadership. When asked about the importance of administrator leadership to the success of a peer mediation program, Dana quickly said: “Administrator support [is important], but not necessarily leadership. Having a strong coordinator is what’s important.” In her case, her administration was relatively supportive, but did not have the expertise and knowledge that Dana already had when she started working at the school as a counselor. Dana had a clear idea of what it took to establish a successful peer

mediation program and was proactive about getting support from the whole school staff before implementing the program. “The key is having a coordinator and having support. You have to ask [the staff]: Do you want to do this? If you want to, I will plan it, but I’m not going to do it alone.”

All of the other counselors felt that it was very important or essential to have strong administrator leadership in implementing a program. Sue’s administrators have been strong advocates of the program from the very beginning. Early on that meant allotting budget monies for a paid coordinator. Now that means referring many students to the peer mediation program and supporting projects in general that encourage students to develop good problem-solving skills.

Adele has appreciated her principal’s leadership and support during the time she has worked on the program, but said: “She doesn’t know what goes on. She just likes the fact that we have it.” Her principal’s willingness to advocate for the program has helped maintain teacher cooperation and readiness to let students out of class.

Libby has had to work to get her administration to buy-in to the program, but each year that has gotten better. “It is easier for them to refer [student issues] to peer mediation than to deal with it themselves. So I don’t know if it is out of love of the program, but to get [work] off of their backs. So they’re learning to appreciate it.” Her work would have been easier if the administrators had taken more interest and responsibility in advocating for the program from the beginning.

Based on her own rough experience this past year, Christie explained: “I think administrator leadership can make or break you. If you don’t have the support from the head honcho for anything you’re doing, it’s hard. If you have their backing then the

teachers will accept it.” She was continually frustrated that the principal did not follow through on things she said she would do to support the program and that the principal was only supportive of the program insofar as it didn’t conflict with what she needed from the counselors on any given day.

Behavior management in accordance with conflict resolution theory. Four of the participants said that creating behavior management practices consistent with conflict resolution ideas was very important. The same four also felt that their schools had done this more or less implicitly. Cathy was the only one who felt that her school leaned toward more authoritarian ways of confronting students. She thought that it was important for teachers and administrators to model constructive problem solving and good communication even when they might be angry or frustrated with students.

Other Themes

Below is a brief summary of additional points that participants emphasized in their interviews.

Different schools/different programs. Dana was the only participant who had coordinated more than one program. She was also the only one who had received training by any of the national organizations. She said several times throughout the interview that just as no two schools are alike, no two peer mediation programs can be alike. A program has to be designed in light of a particular school’s resources, structure, and needs.

Diversity of mediators. All participants stressed the importance of recruiting the most diverse group of mediators possible. Dana, Cathy and Libby suggested that this creates more trust and credibility in the program throughout the school and encourages more students to use the program.

Diminishing district support. Sue, Dana and Adele all mentioned that their programs had been pushed during the mid-90s and now received less support from their county system. Sue received training that was offered by her school district. The district also came into Erhart to introduce the program to teachers. The principal allotted half of a teacher's position for the coordination of the original peer mediation program at the school. Almost ten years later, teachers no longer receive this introduction from the county and the paid position was eliminated five or six years ago. Dana's school system required Preston Middle to implement a conflict resolution program in the mid-90s. Her school tried a peer mediation program, which was abandoned after a short time. When she started the new program four years ago, she was given a budget, which has since been taken away. Adele's program was put into place as part of the county school system's dropout prevention program. This too was discontinued after a few years. It has been up to her alone to keep the program going ever since.

PR/Student and teacher buy-in. Dana, Sue, and Libby coordinate high profile peer mediation programs. Sue and her mediators have trained mediators at other middle schools. Libby's mediators have been highlighted on UNC-TV's "Making a Difference." Adele and her mediators attended the International Peacemaking Conference in Arizona and meet each year with a peer delegation of mediators from a school in Washington, D.C.. All of these events have helped win the programs legitimacy among their schools' staff and student bodies.

While Sue's school system and the principal at Erhart did a lot to advertise the program before it started, Adele and Libby described the work that they had to do to win "buy-in" among their colleagues. They both described this as a process that they had to

invest a great deal in initially. As the programs become more established, some of the more resistant faculty come to recognize their benefits when they finally have occasion to experience mediation themselves.

Dana and Sue also work to keep their programs well advertised within the student body. Dana's students wear t-shirts that say "Talking Works" and "Talk and Mediators Listen." Sue's students put together an advertisement for the program that is played on the school television network periodically.

Continuity. Libby and Cathy discussed the problem of turnover at their schools. Libby said that the school counselors at Lansing did not have much respect when she first began working there because they had had a different counselor every year in every grade level for five years. She had to win the trust and respect of the teachers and administrators, which took time. Cathy and the other school counselor at Staunton were planning to leave their jobs at the end of this school year. She described what she was doing to wrap-up her program so that the counselors coming in could continue with it if they wanted to. She was concerned that it would be difficult for them: "We'd have a lot to work with if we were going to be here next year. If [the new counselors] choose to do it, they'll be starting from scratch just like we did. That makes it really hard. You have to restart and restart. Never get anywhere."

Expectations and program maturity. Libby's story illustrated the importance of having a long-term perspective. She started her program with 12 mediators in one grade and now has mediators in each grade. She started the program with very little teacher and administrator support, and now feels that most teachers and administrators support the program. Next year she will have a budget. While she still wished for more help with the

program, she also recognized what the program has accomplished so far. Cathy was very discouraged with her first year implementing and coordinating the program at Staunton, but she also recognized that her disappointment might have something to do with lack of experience: “Maybe if someone with more experience had taken this on, they would have had more realistic ideas about what was going to happen. We were all gung-ho and thought that it would be great. Maybe if we had had more experience, we would have had more realistic expectations.”

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

In the world of conflict resolution education, the question of the 1990's was "Does it Work?" The resounding answer was affirmative but conditional: comprehensive programs with plenty of administrator commitment and teacher training consistently have positive results. But the new concern is how to create successful programs that are feasible in most schools. While violence prevention continues to be important, high stakes testing and accountability issues are the new priorities on the national education agenda. School counselors, who might have been asked to be peer mediation coordinators ten years ago, are becoming testing coordinators today. State budget crises are hitting school budgets and cutting dispute settlement centers. Federal cuts threaten school counselor positions that had been created in the 1990's. The current configuration of issues in education makes the competing demands of comprehensiveness and feasibility in peer mediation programs all the more difficult to reconcile.

While the professional literature tends to push comprehensive programs and criticize what they characterize as "ad-hoc", "fix-it" programs that tend to be smaller and less theoretically grounded, these latter programs are designed to operate within the parameters of individual schools' immediate resources. This is certainly a primary reason why they are so widespread, if also perhaps why they can be short-lived. Whatever can be learned about how counselor coordinators are negotiating the tension between ideal conditions for a program and their school's resources might help keep conflict resolution education within the grasp of more schools rather than becoming a passing fad.

Considerations

By analyzing the ways that coordinator perceptions confirm or contradict the research findings about what makes programs successful, this study has generated some general and some specific considerations for anyone starting a new program or maintaining an existing one.

Establishing goals: how comprehensive? Before getting into particular details of program design, it is important to note the discrepancy between the comprehensive programs recommended by the literature and the actual programs that the study participants have coordinated. Comprehensive programs would include developmentally appropriate conflict resolution education at each grade level, teacher and administrator training, a school-wide peer mediation program, and discipline strategies consistent with principles of conflict resolution. While there was certainly a range of comprehensibility in the programs represented by this study, none of them could be described as comprehensive programs. Two schools had violence prevention curricula that included a few lessons about conflict resolution, but none of the schools made an explicit effort to integrate thorough conflict resolution curricula into their programming. In the best case scenarios, teachers and administrators received a lot of education about peer mediation, but it was only at Preston Middle that a significant number of staff had been trained. All of the programs were cadre programs rather than school-wide programs.

When evaluating the most significant result of their programs, four of the five coordinators focused on the benefits that the program brought to student mediators rather than to the whole school. Only Dana mentioned a more abstract and general result: “Kids helping kids.” This is not to say that the coordinators did not see their programs

benefiting the whole school. In fact, with the exception of Cathy, all coordinators thought that their programs improved school and classroom atmosphere and increased nonviolent and productive problem solving within the student body. Dana, Libby, and Sue all described scenarios in which teachers went through mediation with students and became strong advocates of the program. Libby also felt strongly that her program was “crucial, not just for conflict resolution, but for the diversity... having understanding and respect for other people.” These are significant achievements and they provide important learning opportunities for students and teachers who have contact with the program.

At the same time, long-term advocates of conflict resolution education would argue that some of the most powerful potentialities of conflict resolution education can be overlooked or undervalued when programs do not attempt to change the whole structure of a school. Conflict resolution is an effective strategy for violence prevention because it is proactive and based on clearly defined skills or competencies, but its goals are far greater than preventing physical violence. Problem-solving strategies such as mediation and negotiation are especially useful for addressing issues of psychological violence that are so common, yet often minimized or dismissed in competitive, punishing school environments (Schrumpf et al., 1994).

This is important because the psychological struggles that take place in schools may have consequences that turn out to be as tragic and disastrous as some of the horrific incidences of school violence that have attracted nation-wide attention. To illustrate this point, it is interesting to note that statistics about school violence have actually decreased almost every year since 1994 (2000 Annual Report on School Safety). While this is certainly a trend deserving of celebration, other disturbing facts underscore that students

and teachers experience plenty of painful and unresolved conflicts during the school day. Firstly, despite the drop in violent crime, students do not perceive schools as being safer. A poll done by the Justice Policy Institute and the Children's Law Center indicated that seven out of ten Americans believed a shooting was likely to happen in their schools and 62% believed that juvenile crime was on the increase. From 1998 to 1999, the percentage of students who felt that their classrooms' were safe dropped from 40% to 33%. Secondly, after progress was made in the 1970's and 1980's to reduce high school dropout rates, they continued to be very stable during the 1990's (Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics). When this finding was released to the media on November 15, 2001, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige commented: "Despite the growing investment in education at all levels, student achievement has lagged... The study released today is another indicator that we have not made enough progress in recent years to improve access to quality education and that comprehensive change is needed." Thirdly, it is increasingly difficult to keep new teachers in the field of public education. Today between 30% and 60% of new teachers leave the field within the first three years depending on how much training they began their career with (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Classroom management is consistently among the top complaints of teachers today (Gallup/PDK, 1999). For many reasons it seems that schools fail to provide the conditions for an increasing number of students and teachers to thrive personally, academically, or professionally.

Can conflict resolution education really hope to make this kind of impact on the day-to-day functioning of the school as it is experienced by all students and teachers? Researchers in the field certainly believe that it can and that it should work towards total

school reform, but these broad and far-reaching goals *would* demand a more comprehensive program in terms of extent of training and number of students and faculty involved. Is this what anyone with ambitions for starting a program needs to aspire to?

Long-term vs. short-term goals: Institutionalization and maturation. The importance of having a long-term perspective on any project cannot be underestimated, particularly in schools where staff and student turnover is fast and widespread. If there are goals that are worth establishing then they must be backed up by a vision of how they can be achieved over time under varying conditions. Peer mediation programs can be quick to come and go when they rest solely on one person's efforts and do not seek to draw in the participation and enthusiasm of other educators.

Lupton-Smith et al. (1996) described the value of limited peer mediation programs as well as the importance that they develop and mature into more comprehensive programs over time. This seems like a sensible and positive approach to building a program: beginning with what resources are available and working towards a more expanded program while exploring or developing new resources to support it.

Dana, who was the only coordinator who had received training from CREnet, had a good sense of what she needed from the school to make her school's program worthwhile as well as how she would like to see the program develop in the future. She said several times that given the resources, she would institute a full conflict resolution curriculum for each grade level at her school, but there had been school crises that had taken priority over this project as long as she had been at Preston.

Conflict resolution in the classroom vs. peer mediation. All of the participants in the study agreed that having a school-wide conflict resolution curriculum would be very

important to the success of a peer mediation program. The literature also emphasizes the importance of developmentally appropriate conflict resolution curricula that students learn from throughout their whole school experience. If there were a question of putting into place a conflict resolution curriculum or a peer mediation program, it would seem that a conflict resolution curriculum could have a greater impact on the whole school environment because it tends to be more thorough and because it engages students and teachers in learning and practicing skills together. Peer mediation can be an important extension of such a program whether as a school-wide program or a cadre program, but neither is a good substitute for one. The problem, of course, is that asking teachers to implement another program with their students is not realistic in most schools. Doing so would require time, money and school-wide enthusiasm that few public schools have to spare. Peer mediation, on the other hand, “is doable.” And can have powerful effects on the lives of mediators and on other teachers and students.

Cadre programs vs. school-wide programs. While it may be desirable to offer peer mediation as a school-wide program so that all students learn and practice skills themselves, this would be highly impractical in many schools without drastic redistribution of time and funding. In addition, this study suggests that cadre programs may be able to have a significant impact on school environments. A small program must be highly creative and consistently visible to be capable of influencing a whole school environment. The administration and faculty must invest in creating a school culture that values mediation skills and fosters respect for student mediators. Finally, mediators must be both diverse and well liked by their peers. Each of the study participants mentioned the importance of selecting mediators who represented different aspects of the student

body. This seems essential for building trust and interest in the program throughout student body.

Becoming informed. When beginning a program, it is instructive to be aware of other practitioner experiences and of research findings. While it may not be possible or necessary to follow all the recommendations that the professional literature makes about how to design a successful program, being familiar with well-researched “best practices” can give those starting programs a sense of what to expect from their first year with the program and how to solve problems more effectively as they arise. It can also provide a sense of how a program might develop in the future and how to set goals that are realistic and “doable.”

National associations are important resources for connecting with other practitioners and for keeping abreast of research recommendations. The Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR) is an excellent source of information as are organizations such as Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR), School Mediation Associates (SMA), the Colorado School Mediation Project (CSMP), the Community Boards Program, and the National Center for Conflict Resolution Education (NCCRE). Most of these programs have web-sites and are useful for locating books, videos, and curricular material as well as for finding out about training, grants, and conferences.

Resource assessment, planning and support. In this study, it was Dana who reiterated several times: “You have to design a program to fit the school you are at. Otherwise it won’t work.” It is important to realize that schools do have vastly different resources at their disposal and vastly different needs that they attempt to address. Doing a

formal or informal assessment of needs and resources can help anyone designing a program to focus their initial efforts more efficiently and proactively.

Adele brought up the fact that some students have more to gain from going through intensive mediation training than others. Likewise, in schools where there is more strife and less harmony, a peer mediation or conflict resolution training program might be a higher priority than in more peaceful schools.

School mission and philosophy, population, extent of student and teacher turnover, number of student and support staff, type of schedule, extent of administrator and teacher interest, are just some of the variables that need to be considered in how a program is designed and implemented.

The study largely confirmed the importance of administrator leadership to program success. Surely, the more enthusiastic and informed support that can be stirred throughout the administration and faculty, the better. Administrators have the power to allot time and money for the program and, if they have good rapport with teachers, can do a lot to win teacher support for the program. At the same time, Libby's story in particular also suggests that much can be done with minimal administrator support and that administrators can become more supportive over time as they see the program making important contributions to the school.

In this study it was clear that the schools in which the teachers had the most exposure to and awareness of conflict resolution and peer mediation were also the schools that enjoyed the most support and the least resistance to the program. As Adele emphasized, everyone in public education is overwhelmed. Teachers are often resistant to new projects that might demand extra time or work on their part or that might take

students out of their classes. Pushing “innovations” on teachers before they are convinced that they are worth the time and effort can breed resentment and mistrust of new ideas and projects more generally. Therefore it is important to assess teacher knowledge and interest in a peer mediation program well before initiating the program and doing whatever possible to draw them in. Dana and Libby emphasized how much work they put into building hype around the program and educating teachers about its structure and goals. Creating a place for, or even requiring, staff involvement from the beginning, as Dana did, removes some of the burden from the coordinator, takes a step towards institutionalizing the program by making it viable even if she were to leave, and adds legitimacy and potency to the program as more adults model the many skills fundamental to mediation and conflict resolution.

Libby’s story highlighted findings by Singh (1995) and Paul Jones (1998) that winning support from teachers and administrators takes time and effort. It is important to be prepared for a certain amount of resistance to the project and to create a forum for faculty feedback. Soliciting the opinions and experiences of teachers and administrators on a regular basis gives them an opportunity to voice concerns or complaints that should be addressed, but also gives coordinators opportunities to recognize the support they are gaining even if small and gradual.

The most immediate way to build support for a program may be to train the whole faculty. The teachers at Erhart Middle received some significant staff development on conflict resolution in the mid-90s, but no follow-up training has been done. Libby offers a staff development workshop on listening skills and diversity at the beginning of each year. This is the most systematic and extensive training offered to teachers in the schools

represented in this study. Several of the participants discussed turning points with teachers who became excited about mediation after working through a conflict referred to the program by a student. The literature recommends that conflict resolution curricula be developmentally appropriate and this is surely important for teachers who are learning new skills as well. They need to learn to how to mediate themselves, not simply how to teach students to mediate. If teachers experience success in working through issues that they have with each other or with students through conflict resolution strategies, they will be much more apt to recognize the value in sharing these skills with their students.

When asked to estimate the importance of administrator leadership to peer mediation programs, Dana asserted “It is not essential if you have a strong coordinator.” And her program certainly does. While the other counselors seemed less willing to assert their own leadership per se, they all mentioned the importance of having a strong and committed coordinator. Indeed, none of these programs would exist without the women who are working hard to keep them going today. Coordinators’ conviction that these programs are valuable and worthwhile and their motivation to keep them going despite all that they are required to do can take a program a long way even in difficult circumstances.

Local organizations are a great source of support within a school. Many states still have county dispute settlement centers and many of these have staff who work exclusively on school programs. Although the program at Cathy’s school suffered from a lack of internal support, the training that the local center offered the students in the program was excellent. Even when such a center might not be able to work with a school on an on-going basis, it can often be a valuable source of materials and information.

Juvenile justice programs, teen court, and boys and girls clubs sometimes have grant monies for projects that involve young people in community service or violence prevention efforts. Linking school and community efforts reinforce both and can often be another source of support in the form of money or volunteer time.

Other schools that have active peer mediation programs can be a source of inspiration and ideas for coordinators beginning programs and for students once they are mediating. Dana's staff mediators and student mediators have made contacts nationally and internationally and are better able to evaluate their own work and recognize its importance. Libby and Sue's students have trained other students, which boosts their personal sense of accomplishment and has been important for the schools who received their training. From the other side, Adele's students have been trained by experienced high school students and went through training with students from another middle school in their county.

Limitations

This study has generated ideas about how to conceive of peer mediation programs that can be effective, realistic, and sustainable. The qualitative data resulting from the interviews provided a more complex understanding of the dynamics between each school, its program, and their evolution over time than quantitative data could. The data, however, are limited by the small sample size, the short-term nature of the study, and the self-selection that occurred in recruiting study participants. All of the counselors who agreed to participate in the study were strong advocates for their programs and believed that their investment in the programs were important and worthwhile. Interviews with counselors who had experienced less success or who were less motivated by and

committed to conflict resolution education may have generated significantly different results.

Recommendations for Future Research

Researchers have tended to be dismissive of programs that are not based on theoretical work. At the same time, many realize that practitioners are constantly struggling to do as much as they can with the few resources that they have. Designing and executing programs based on solid research is often not as big a priority as getting a feasible program in place. As research professionals look at comprehensiveness and institutionalization of programming as ultimate goals and “best practices”, it is also important to look at what is actually happening in most schools. More research needs to be done on cadre programs and how they can be designed to have the most impact on the larger school environment. Additionally, more work could be done to give practitioners guidelines on building more stable and mature programs over time. Finally, more research could be done in the spirit of this study, which focuses on what kind of programming exists despite the theory. While often such a project confirms the hypotheses of professional research, looking at the field from the practitioner’s perspective can open new avenues for inquiry and build a better understanding of what can be achieved with limited resources.

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Appendix A
Questionnaire
Middle School Peer Mediation Programs currently
Coordinated by School Counselors

Please provide the following descriptive information about your school.

Name of School: _____

County: _____

Estimated total population of students in your school: _____

Estimated % of students in Free and Reduced Lunch Program: _____

Estimated % of students African-American: _____
 Asian-American: _____
 Euro-American: _____
 Latino: _____
 Other: _____

Number of School Counselors: _____

Please provide the following descriptive information about your peer mediation program.

How long has the program been in existence? _____

How many students participate each year as mediators? _____

How many conflicts are mediated each year? _____

How are students referred for mediation? (Circle those that apply)

Self-referral Teacher Referral Administrator Referral Parent Referral

Does your program have its own budget? _____ If so, how much? _____

When do students mediate? (Circle those that apply)

Any time needed During Activity Periods After School Other _____

How long is student training? (Number and length of sessions): _____

How many staff members are actively involved in the program? _____

Have teachers and administrators also received mediation and/or conflict resolution training in your school? _____ If so, to what extent? (Number and length of sessions): _____ How many teachers/administrators? _____

On a scale of 1 to 10, how supportive of peer mediation is your principal? _____

On a scale of 1 to 10, how supportive of peer mediation are most teachers? _____

Is there a conflict resolution education curriculum taught on a school-wide basis in your school? _____

Are your school's behavior expectations and behavior management system consistent with conflict resolution theory? _____

What are your program's main objectives?

How is your program evaluated?

And finally... about your background:

How long have you been a school counselor? _____

How long have you worked as a school counselor at this school? _____

How long have you been coordinating the peer mediation program? _____

What prior experience in conflict resolution education or peer mediation have you had?

Appendix B
Interview Instrument
The Real and the Ideal in Middle School Peer Mediation Programs

1. In your opinion, how effective is peer mediation as a strategy:

- To prevent school violence?
- To decrease bullying and teasing?
- To improve school and classroom atmosphere?
- To improve individual students' academic performance?
- To improve student self-esteem?

2. Do you feel your program accomplishes some of these things?

3. What do you feel is the most significant result of your program?

4. What would you change about your program if you could?

5. What would you need to make those changes?

6. How would you rank the importance of the following five traits to a successful peer mediation program? Please fill in the blank next to each trait with either: N (not important), S (somewhat important), V (very important), or E (essential).

- _____ teacher and administrator training
- _____ a comprehensive K-12 conflict resolution curriculum
- _____ practice opportunities for all students
- _____ school behavior management systems based on conflict resolution theory
- _____ strong administrator leadership

7. Place a check next to each of the same traits if they apply to your program:

- _____ teacher and administrator training
- _____ a comprehensive K-12 conflict resolution curriculum
- _____ practice opportunities for all students
- _____ school behavior management systems based on conflict resolution theory
- _____ strong administrator leadership

Appendix C
North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: The Ideal and the Real in Middle School Peer Mediation Programs

Principal Investigator: Maura Dillon

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Stanley B. Baker

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to generate a list of practical concerns for school counselors advocating for or coordinating peer mediation programs in middle schools. By comparing the experiences and expertise of schools counselors currently running programs to the recommendations made in the professional literature, I hope to assemble some useful information about what is working in middle schools now and what some of the obstacles to more successful programs might be.

INFORMATION

Participation in the study would involve filling out a questionnaire regarding your school's demographics, your peer mediation program structure, and your professional background in conflict resolution education (20-30 minutes) and one recorded interview (45-60 minutes) and a brief follow-up interview (15-20 minutes).

RISKS and CONFIDENTIALITY

The potential risk of the study is that the principal investigator will have access to the data. This information will be analyzed and your identity disguised. **All information collected for this study will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely and be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.**

BENEFITS

By participating in this study, you will contribute to a better understanding of the characteristics that are most essential to organizing and maintaining successful peer mediation programs in middle schools.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Maura Dillon, by mail: Horton Middle School, Pittsboro, NC, 27312; phone: 919-542-6439; e-mail: mamosh68@hotmail.com; or Stanley Baker, by phone: 919-515-6360; e-mail: Stanley_Baker@ncsu.edu. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matt Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee at 919-513-1834, Box 8101, NCSU Campus.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____ **Date:** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix D

Letter of Attestation

October 10, 2002

To Whom it May Concern

I have been the designated auditor for the thesis of Maura Dillon, Master's student in the Department of Counselor Education at North Carolina State University.

My role as auditor has been to ensure that the results of this study are dependable, credible and confirmable and not based on researcher bias.

My primary responsibilities as auditor have been to: 1) review and verify the data gathered from the research participants and 2) to attest to having done so.

The audit process consisted of the following:

- Reviewing auditor expectations with the researcher.
- Familiarizing myself with the study by reading chapters 1 and 3 of the thesis.
- Reviewing informed consent forms signed by each participant and written questionnaires.
- Reading interview transcriptions and listening to some recorded interview material.
- Examining researcher's interpretations and categories in chapter 4 for their appropriateness.

Upon completing this process I attest that the findings in this study are dependable and confirmable. No inconsistencies, illogical inferences or research bias were found during the course of this process; therefore, the research findings are also credible.

Sincerely,

Doug Dotson