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Evaluating the effectiveness and use of the peer mediation program in the Galloway Township Middle School

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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS AND USE OF THE

PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM IN THE GALLOWAY

TOWNSHIP MIDDLE SCHOOL

by
Susan Kerrigan

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
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Approved by

Date Approved _____

Abstract

Susan Kerrigan

Evaluating the Effectiveness
and Use of the Peer Mediation
Program in the Galloway
Township Middle School
2003
Dr. Dennis Hurley
School Administration

This study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness and use of the peer mediation program in the Galloway Township Middle School in order to improve the program and increase its use.

Data was gathered using four separate research instruments. These instruments included a survey, monitoring the Peer Mediation Reports and interviews with the building administrators and the schools peer mediators. These methods were used to obtain the students and staff member's perceptions of the process regarding its use and ways to improve the program.

It was concluded that peer mediation is used and supported by the teachers and administrators, however, they feel inservices are needed to orient the staff to the process. Teachers and administrators claimed it is effective in reducing minor conflicts. Peer mediators assert that the process can be used more by the teachers and students.

Staff inservices, advertising the process and including it as an intervention on the schools Level I Discipline Referral were recommended strategies that can be used to improve the program and increase its use.

Mini –Abstract

Susan Kerrigan

Evaluating the Effectiveness
and Use of the Peer Mediation
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The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness and use of the peer

mediation program in the Galloway Township Middle School.

The study's results indicated that strategies need to be implemented that will increase

the exposure of the program, thereby increasing its use.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my daughter Susanne, for always giving me her support and understanding in everything I do. Although this degree is a major accomplishment, Susanne is my greatest accomplishment.

Thank you to my Mom and Dad for being there when I needed them most and for always giving me the encouragement to follow my dreams.

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I would like to thank my two school-based mentors, Ms. Robin Moore, Principal, and Ms. Karen D'Avino, Assistant Principal at the Galloway Township Middle School, who shared their knowledge, experiences and leadership with me during my internship at their school.

And, thank you Dr. Dennis Hurley and Dr. Ronald Capasso. Without your guidance and advice, my latest dream would not have become a reality.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

Peer mediation is a process where student mediators work with other students in their

school or classroom to resolve minor disputes and conflicts that result between students

in these settings. Through the use of peer mediation, minor disputes are resolved at the

lowest level, without administrative response.

The Galloway Township Public School District has been using the peer mediation

process since 1992. The district's middle school utilizes the program to settle minor

disputes that arise among its seventh and eighth grade students. While one would think

that the program would be very active in a middle school, the program's advisor and

supervisor believe that it has not been optimally used in recent years. The focus of this

study is to evaluate the effectiveness and present use of the peer mediation program in

order to determine ways to improve the program and increase its use in the Galloway

Township Middle School.

Purpose of the Study

In recent years, violence has become a major focus of attention in all realms of our

society, including our schools. Generally speaking, schools are considered safe places

for children. Despite this fact, there is still concern about maintaining safer school

environments. In response to this escalating concern, schools are adopting plans and

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programs aimed at preventing or intervening incidents or behaviors that threaten their environments.

Violence prevention programs are becoming a common element of many school curriculums. One particular program involves a process where students act as neutral mediators in resolving minor disputes or conflicts that result between their school peers. This process is known as peer mediation. Through the use of peer mediation, misunderstandings, name calling, gossip, teasing and arguing is resolved at the lowest level, without administrative response. It is a positive process, not only resulting in conflict resolution, but also a development of student responsibility and life skills that can be used beyond the classroom.

The Galloway Township Public School District has been using the peer mediation process since 1992. The district's elementary schools use the program to settle minor disputes that arise among its students. One would think that this program would be very active in the district's middle school as well. However, it is believed that the program at the middle school has not been optimally used in recent years. Therefore, the focus of this study will be to ascertain the effectiveness and use of the program at the middle school in order to identify and then implement strategies that would effectively improve the program and increase its use. As a result of increasing the use of the peer mediation program, the number of minor conflicts will be resolved in a way that will benefit the school's students, teachers and administrative staff.

<u>Definitions</u>

Peer Mediation – While mediation is used in environments outside the school, peer mediation in the context of this study will be used to refer to students in the school

setting. One source defines peer mediation as a "negotiation-based strategy" that students use to manage and resolve minor conflicts between their peers. (Peterson & Skiba, 2001) Another source emphasizes the involvement of a neutral third party or facilitator in resolving disputes and negotiating an agreement between disputants. (Bodine, 1996) For the purpose of this study, the Galloway Township Public School's description of peer mediation will be used in defining this term. Peer mediation is described as a win-win process that is used to settle differences between students that are caused by misunderstandings, name-calling, gossip, teasing and arguing. Neutral student mediators, selected by their peers and teachers, are trained in mediation techniques. They help their peers work out differences in a cooperative and confidential atmosphere.

Minor Conflicts – In the context of this study, minor conflicts will refer to student behaviors that include bullying, teasing, name calling, gossip, rumors, misunderstanding and arguing.

Limitations of the Study

This study will focus on the Peer Mediation Program at the Galloway Township Middle School in the Galloway Township Public School District, located in Galloway Township, Atlantic County, New Jersey. It will include a sampling of seventh and eighth grade students, their teachers, the program advisor, the program supervisor and building administrators. Therefore, the findings of the study will be limited to this setting and its population.

The study is limited by the data collection technique. A survey will be used to obtain information regarding the effectiveness and use of the Peer Mediation Program. The strength of the study is determined by the participant's willingness to participate in the

study and their honesty in answering survey questions. In addition, the effects of the staff and administrative member's demeanor as they participate in the survey will limit the study.

The study is limited by the accuracy of the Peer Mediator Reports. It is limited by the collection technique used to extract appropriate data from this information. It is also limited by the peer mediator's and administrator's willingness to participate in an interview and to honestly submit their answers during the interview process.

Setting of the Study

The Galloway Township Public School District provides educational services to approximately 4000 children of Galloway Township. Galloway Township, a 95 square mile rural municipality, is located in Atlantic County, New Jersey, seven miles northwest of Atlantic City. The casino industry has contributed to a rapid growth of residents in the township. Census figures in 1990 indicate that the population of Galloway Township was 23,330. According to 2000 census figures, the population jumped to nearly 32,000. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000)

These census figures reflect the growth of the Galloway Township Public Schools, whose in-school student enrollment was 4,043 on opening day of the 2002-03 school year. There are nine schools in the district; two kindergarten learning centers, four elementary schools containing first through sixth grades, two elementary schools containing first to fourth grades, and one middle school that houses the district's seventh and eighth grades. High school students attend a regional facility located within the township but is not included in the school district. The district operates under a Superintendent of Schools, an Assistant Superintendent, and four Supervisors. There are

approximately 500 employees in the district. Of this total, 410 are professional staff and 90 are custodial, food service, teacher's aids and secretarial staff. Total cost per pupil in the district is $8544. (New Jersey School Report Card, 2000-01)

Sources of revenue for the 2001-02 district school budget included local taxes, state and federal funds. The Galloway Township Public School District receives 45% of its revenue from local taxes, 49% from state funding, 1% from federal funding and 5 % from other sources. (New Jersey School Report Card, 2000-01) Over the years, the school district has experienced a mixture of success and failure rates in support of its budget. The increased population of retired residents in the township has been attributed as one of the major reasons for the defeat of the district's budget. For the past two years the school budget was defeated. The base budget of $17,939,014 was narrowly defeated in 2002 by ten votes.

The Galloway Township Middle School opened its doors in February 2001. The 150,000 square foot facility has a growing student population of 985 students. Approximately 13% of the student population has individual education plans. The average class size is 21 students. Student to faculty ratio is 12.7 to 1. The student attendance rate is 95%. Student mobility rate is 11.7%. The diversity of the district is reflected in the middle school's language diversity figures, where 88% of the students speak English, 4% Spanish, 1% Urdu, 1% Gujarati and 5% other. Student suspensions for 2001 were 15.3%, down 0.7% from the previous school year. (New Jersey School Report Card, 2001)

The "school-within-a-school" concept is the foundation for the school's interdisciplinary, team approach. Under the leadership of a principal and two assistant

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principals, 89 professional staff members are responsible for the delivery of the school's curriculum. The curriculum is based upon the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, as well as national subject matter standards and the expertise of the professional staff. Co-curricular programs are offered both during and after school. These activities serve to develop student leadership, responsibility and cooperation.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study will be organized in the following manner:

Chapter One contains introductory material, including a focus of the study, purpose of the study, definitions, limitations and the setting of the study.

Chapter Two contains a review of the literature as it relates to statistical findings about school violence and local, state and federal response in addressing violence in schools. The main focus of the review centers on peer mediation, including its historical background, framework for its use, types of conflicts addressed by the process, goals of the process, frequency of use issues and benefits to the students, teaching staff and administrators.

Chapter Three describes the research design and the development and design of the research instrumentation as well as sampling and sampling techniques. A description of the data collection approach and a description of the data analysis plan is also included.

Chapter Four includes a presentation of the research findings, including an interpretation of the results of the study.

Chapter Five describes the conclusions, the implications of the study on leadership skills and organizational change and recommendations for further study.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Violence is a common occurrence in today's world, effecting all facets of our society,

including our schools. In recent years, tragic shootings have been witnessed within and

around schools. These tragic acts of violence have taken the lives of students and their

teachers. Although current statistical findings indicate that schools are one of the safest

places that children can be, there are still concerns and challenges to maintaining this

safety.

Fortunately, most schools have never experienced tragic acts of violence such as

those witnessed at Columbine High School and other schools in recent years. But it

would be safe to say that all schools experience minor conflicts within the confines of

their walls. These minor conflicts affect the entire school population. Managing these

minor conflicts becomes a challenge to the teachers and administrators who are

responsible for not only the education of their students but, for their safety as well.

Nationwide School Violence

Studies indicate that there has been a decrease of crime in schools since 1992.

(Departments of Education and Justice, 2000) To illustrate this decline, a historical

review of crime in schools indicates that in 1993 one half of sixth through twelfth grade

students witnessed a crime at school. One in eight students were actual victims of crime

at school. Over 70 percent of students surveyed in the National Household Education

Survey had knowledge of bullying, physical attack or robbery in their schools. (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995a) In another study it was reported that 300,000 high school students were physically attacked per month. One in five high school students brought weapons to school. (Trevaskis, 1994)

In 1995 Sauter reported that a school crime took place every six seconds and 11 percent of all crimes took place in America's 85,000 public schools. On a daily basis, 100,000 children were taking guns to school. It was estimated that forty teachers were being physically attacked every hour. Also, it was reported that school violence was on the rise and schools were not safe. (Castro, 1995)

By 1997, the number of students bringing weapons to school was declining. From 1991 to 1997, students who brought weapons to school decreased by 28 percent. (National Education Association, 2001) Even though one source reported that physical attacks or fights without a weapon were the most commonly reported crime in the 1996-1997 school year, the incidence of fighting in school was declining. (Kaufman, Chen, Choy, Ruddy, Miller, Fleury, Chandler, Rand, Klaus & Planty, 2000) One study reported a 9 percent decrease of fights on school property from 1993-1997. (Gaustad, 1999)

The 2000 edition of The Annual Report on School Safety reported a decrease of nonfatal crimes from 1992-1998. Crimes against students that included theft, rape, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated and simple assault, decreased from 3.4 million in 1992 to 2.7 million in 1998. The number of violent death incidents in schools decreased from 49 in the 1995-1996 school year to 34 in the 1998-1999 school year. Weapon violations continued to decline. (Departments of Education and Justice, 2000)

As schools entered the new millennium, the trend of a decrease in school crime, violence and weapon offenses continued. The Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Center for Education Statistics noted in their 2000 report entitled "Indicators of School Crime Safety," that levels of crime in school had decreased. The victimization rate for violent crimes declined from 1992-1999. Similarly, it was reported that less students, ages 12 to 18 years old, were victims of nonfatal crimes in 1999 compared to those in 1995. The number of physical fights on school property also experienced a decline from 16 percent in 1993 to 14 percent in 1999. Five percent of the 12 through 18-year-old students reported being bullied at school in this 2000 report. (Kaufman, Chen, Choy, Ruddy, Miller, Fleury, Chandler, Rand, Klaus & Planty, 2000)

School Violence on the Local Level

While school violence was decreasing on a national level, the New Jersey Department of Education indicated in its 2000-01 "Violence, Vandalism and Substance Abuse in New Jersey School Report" that there was a 26 percent increase in the violence category. Simple assaults increased by 29 percent and fights increased by 19 percent. The category "other weapons," which includes air guns, imitation guns and weapons other than handguns, rifles, bombs and fireworks, had a 9 percent increase. Firearm offenses with rifles and handguns had decreased by 55 percent. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2002)

The location of incidents took place in the classroom 32 percent of the time, in the school corridor 19 percent of the time and on the school grounds 13 percent of the time. One third or 34 percent of the reported incidents took place in the middle school setting. Known offenders consisted of regular education students in 72 percent of the cases.

Students with disabilities made up 27 percent of the known offenders. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2002)

The school of focus in this study has seen a steady decrease of violence and weapons incidents over the past three years. From 1999 to 2002 there has been a 96 percent decrease in violence as reported to the State's Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System. Weapons incidents decreased 86 percent from 1999 to 2002. But these figures only reflect the more serious incidents. It does not include the minor incidents such as arguments, shoving matches and other minor disputes that arise between middle school students while they are in school. These minor conflicts have the potential to escalate into more serious incidents.

The Impact of Violence on Schools

School violence, whether it is serious in nature or simply a minor dispute, impacts the school and learning environments and the people within them. The National Household Education Survey of 1993 reported that 17 percent of middle or junior high school students had been victims of crime. One third of sixth through twelfth graders reported that they witnessed a physical attack at school. It is no wonder that 34 percent of middle and junior high school students reported that they were worried of being victims of crime at school. Witnessing attacks or being victims of attacks affects a student's sense of security and has an impact upon their learning process. (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995a)

The National Household Education Survey of 1993 also reported that some students develop certain strategies to avoid trouble at school. These strategies include staying in a

group, avoiding certain places and events in school and even staying home. (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995)

Conflicts in school exhaust teachers and administrators time and energy. Time and effort is spent in handing out detentions and suspensions. More student aggression occurs as a result. (Johnson & Johnson, 1996) Once again, the learning environment is disrupted and effective learning is decreased.

Parents worry as they send their children off to school, fearing for their safety. Although parental fears have subsided since the early 1990's, it was reported in 1999 that parents were afraid for their children while they were at school. The shooting events at Columbine High school contributed greatly to these fears. (U. S. Public Research Service, 2002)

Violence is creating a financial burden to schools. "High tech hardware," in the form of metal detectors, cameras and photo identification systems, have made their way into schools. Security guards and local police patrol school hallways and their perimeters. (Gaustad, 1999) These interventions come at a cost to school districts and the communities they serve.

Responding to School Violence

What is being done to insure students and their teacher's safety while they are in and around school? In 2000-2001, the federal government allotted $7.6 million dollars to the New Jersey Department of Education for local district's use under the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act program. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2002)

The federal government, in cooperation with various agencies and individuals, has also studied youth and violence in order to develop solutions to this problem. Surgeon

General, Dr. David Satcher, along with the centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The National Institutes of Health and The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, established a Planning Board whose efforts lead to a report entitled, "Youth Violence: A Report of the Surgeon General." The report addressed causes and risk factors contributing to youth violence, as well as preventive measures and future plans for decreasing violence among the nation's youths. (U. S. Public Research Service, 2002)

Individual agencies have funded, researched or provided other assistance to deal with youth violence and violence in schools. In recent years, the Center for Disease Control has funded various projects across the United States to address youth violence in schools. These projects have researched intervention and prevention strategies in various grade levels of schools. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002) The National Education Association has advocated programs and provided assistance to schools, parents and communities in the form of information through written guides and a video program entitled, "Safe Schools Now Network." (National Education Association, 2001)

The State of New Jersey has engaged in activities to address school violence. It has funded initiatives such as the Character Education Initiative and the Safe Schools and Communities Violence Prevention and Response Plan Initiative (2001-2002). New Jersey's Administrative Code entitled "Programs to Support Student Development" includes issues such as codes of student conduct, incident reporting, access to juvenile information and other items that address school safety. Within New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards is the requirement that public schools teach violence prevention skills. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2002)

Individually, New Jersey school districts are participating in various violence prevention programs. Many districts use more than one program: 38 percent use three different programs and 20 percent use four different programs. The most frequently used violence prevention programs in the 1999-2000 school year were those that were developed locally, followed by Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E) and Here's Looking at You 2000. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2002)

Peer Mediation

With student to student confrontations occurring daily in schools, programs have been developed that focus on resolving conflicts and preventing them from escalating into more serious occurrences. One of these programs is known as peer mediation. In New Jersey, over 353 districts use peer mediation programs. (New Jersey Department of Education, 2002) Peer mediation is a form of conflict resolution where students serve as neutral parties to help other students resolve conflicts. (Girard, 1995) Some describe the process as an "interest-based negotiation procedure," where student mediators use communication and problem solving skills to help other students resolve conflicts. (Phi Delta Kappa International, 2000) The conflicts can result from rumors, name calling, teasing, pushing or shoving, harassment, threats, property issues, fighting, boyfriend/girlfriend or student/teacher relationships. (Guanci, 2002) Some claim that the process is very effective in resolving conflicts, with success rates ranging from 58 to 93 percent. These rates were based on whether resolution was achieved and then maintained. (Trevaskis, 1994)

Mediation is not a new concept used in resolving conflict. Some sources claim that mediation programs have been existence since the 1960's. (Trevaskis, 1994) Before

school-based peer mediation programs came into existence there were community mediation programs. In the 1970's President Jimmy Carter found a need for the concept and came up with Neighborhood Justice Centers, later called Community Mediation Programs. These programs provided people involved in minor disputes with an effective alternative to using the court systems. Former Attorney General Janet Reno urged the nation's schools to use peer mediation. She envisioned the program's benefits through its methods of decreasing violence while also increasing student's self-esteem. (Guanci, 2002) And so, the idea was expanded to include mediation in the school setting. Attorneys and child advocates developed programs such as the "Community Boards Conflict Managers Program" in San Francisco and "Resolving Conflict Creatively" in the New York City Public Schools during the mid-1970's. (Peterson & Skiba, 2001)

In 1984 the National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) was formed. Through this association ideas were discussed on how to teach about mediation and conflict resolution. (Trevaskis, 1994) In 1984, there were fifty school-based conflict resolution programs in the United States. By 1995 this number had increased to over 5,000 programs nationwide. (Girard, 1995)

The Peer Mediation Process

There are many types of peer mediation programs. Some have been developed locally by individual schools, while organizations, companies or private individuals have developed others. They all have a common goal: to resolve conflict. However, there are differences worth mentioning that exist between some of the approaches used. Some peer mediation programs operate outside of the curriculum, while others are part of a mediation program curriculum. Some sources recommend a total school approach to

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conflict resolution while others suggest the use of a "cadre" of students. (Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1995) Some schools have used both the school wide approach and a cadre of students in their approach to implementing the process. (Daunic, Smith & Robinson, 2000)

Johnson and Johnson support the total school approach, noting that this approach allows every student the opportunity to learn how to manage conflicts. Although this approach is time consuming and requires a faculty member's commitment, the end result is that more students will have the knowledge to manage more conflicts. (Johnson & Johnson, 1995) Johnson and Johnson also suggest that negotiation needs to be over-learned. (Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1992) In a 1995 study, Johnson and Johnson examined the effectiveness of a total student body approach to peer mediation training. It was concluded that not only did elementary students learn negotiation and mediation procedures, they also recalled the steps of the procedures immediately after training had ended and throughout the school year. A large percentage of students were able to apply the negotiation and mediation procedures in certain conflicts. This study concluded that the program "...resulted in a more positive classroom climate." Teachers and administrative intervention declined. (Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1995)

Daunic recommends that administrators, conflict resolution and peer mediation teams instill conflict resolution into the curriculum throughout the school year. It must be noted that this is time consuming for teachers and their class schedules. It is suggested that teachers infuse conflict resolution and peer mediation material into other subject areas such as those involving critical thinking and problem solving skills. (Daunic, Smith & Robinson, 2000)

The cadre approach to peer mediation is popular in schools because it is inexpensive and can be easily adopted into a school. However, this approach includes only a select few of the student population. (Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1995) In this approach, mediators are usually recruited annually. In one example presented in the literature, students applied for positions as mediators. Teachers and students were asked to recommend individuals who were trustworthy and dependable. Applicants were screened and interviewed by a committee. The selection committee made sure that a cross sectional representation of students was selected that included at-risk students and students with various academic abilities. (Guanci, 2002) Another example of this approach suggested selecting student mediators from various grade levels, as well as from different races, gender and socioeconomic status. It was recommended that students be included as mediators who may have experienced "high levels" of conflict at school. These students would naturally understand conflict because they were experienced at it. (Daunic, Smith & Robinson, 2000)

Whether students are selected as a part of a cadre or whether the total school approach is used, students must go through a training session where they learn listening skills, critical thinking skills, negotiation, oral and written skills and problem solving. (Guanci, 2002) Bodine recommends that initial training consist of 12-15 hours. This training should be followed up with advanced training consisting of 12 –15 hours. Bodine lists basic training activities to include the following: understanding conflict, responding to conflict, sources of conflict, communication skills, the role of the mediator and the mediation process. He recommends that advanced training include bias awareness, social/cultural diversity, advanced communication, uncovering hidden

interests, dealing with anger, caucusing, negotiating and group problem solving. The inclusion of simulation as part of the training helps to effectively prepare students in dealing with a multitude of conflicts. (Bodine, 1996)

In their training, mediators are taught specific steps in the mediation process. Although these steps contain basic principles, variations exist according to what program is used. The American Bar Association describes a six part model used in the peer mediation process. This model serves as the foundation for many peer mediation programs, including the program that is the focus of this study. Following is a listing of the American Bar Association's six part model, along with a description of the activities that are involved in each.

Part I Introduction – The participants introduce themselves. The mediator explains his or her role. The ground rules and steps of mediation are explained. The mediator asks if there are any questions.

Part II Telling the Story – Each party tells their side of the story to the mediator. Each story is summarized. The mediator makes sure that everyone understands the conflict in question.

Part III Identifying Facts and Feelings – Each party tells their side of the story to one another. The mediator brings out the facts and feelings of what each party says. The parties are asked to change roles. A summary of the facts and feelings of each party is given by the mediator.

Part IV Generating Options – Both parties are asked how they can solve the problem. Solutions are written down and those solutions that are agreed upon by both parties are noted.

Part V Agreement – The solutions that both parties agree to are used to write a contract. The contract is written in the party's own words. Everyone signs the contract.

Part VI Follow-Up – The mediator explains the follow-up process. The mediator thanks the parties for participating and allowing the service to help them. (Trevaskis, 1994)

Students who are in conflict use peer mediation on a voluntary basis. Students, teachers or administrators refer disputing students to the process. Ideally, the mediation session should be scheduled in a timely manner. (Daunic, Smith & Robinson, 2000) Gaunci recommends scheduling mediation within 24 hours. The delay allows students to "cool down," thus increasing the success rate of the mediation session. (Guanci, 2002) In order to maintain and monitor the effectiveness of a peer mediation program, Daunic suggests debriefing sessions for mediators. This process facilitates in assessing how well mediators are following the procedures of the process. Likewise, disputants should be surveyed to obtain their perspectives on the program. Disputants should also be questioned about the value of the program, if it helped them and if the problem remained in resolution. (Daunic, Smith & Robinson, 2000)

If nothing is known about a program, the possibility of that program being effective or successful will diminish or become nonexistent. Promoting the program through various activities becomes a vital part of the implementation process. Public relations activities increase the success of a peer mediation program. Gaunci mentions the importance of public relations activities in the form of staff presentations about peer mediation as well as a video presentation made available to students and their parents. Other activities to promote the program include having a "Peer Mediator of the Week," a

"Peer Mediation Scoreboard," and a "Mediator Day." These events promote awareness to the program, its progress and focuses attention on the people involved in implementing the program. (Guanci, 2002) Other public relations include posters, announcements regarding the program's use, flyers, T-shirts and recognition of mediators. (Daunic, Smith & Robinson, 2000)

Benefits of Peer Mediation

Many conclusions have been formed regarding the benefits of a successful peer mediation program. Such a program benefits the general student population, the peer mediators, teachers, administrators and the school environment. Some sources claim that it ultimately benefits society through its influence upon student's future responses to conflict.

Peer mediation offers endless benefits to students. Daunic notes that not only does peer mediation help students resolve conflicts, it increases their self-esteem, it fosters independence and creates self responsibility. Students have a voice in how their conflicts are resolved. Ultimately, a student's behavior is less likely to become aggressive or destructive in nature. (Daunic, Smith & Robinson, 2000)

According to Bodine, students experience empowerment and feel in control of their lives after using peer mediation. He also noted its effect on developing responsibility among students. Peer mediation offers a constructive means in conflict resolution and gives students a choice in how they behave. In addition, diversity is encouraged through its use. Students learn to get along with others, regardless of their cultural, sexual or academic differences. (Bodine, 1996)

Gaunci notes that peer mediation prevents future conflicts between students. Also, it gives students a sense of ownership in their school. In addition to mentioning its empowering effect on students, Guanci found that peer mediation gives students a feeling of success. (Guanci, 2002) It is a positive process, even though not every mediation session may yield successful results.

David Johnson and Roger Johnson have been instrumental in conducting and reporting extensive research about student benefits associated with the peer mediation process. As was previously mentioned by other authors, Johnson and Johnson also agree that peer mediation empowers students and allows them to assume responsibility for their actions. (Bodine, 1996) They reported that students carry their skills into other environments other than the school. This skill can be a life long activity, enabling students to take these skills into their adult lives. (Johnson & Johnson, 1991) Because they do not have to worry about the argument they had with their friend or a rumor that they heard about themselves, student's academics improve. Time on task increases. Their confidence increases. (Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1995) They become motivated to learn. Their problem solving skills improve in quality and creativity. (Johnson & Johnson, 1996)

The effect that peer mediation has on student behavior and their responses impacts a teacher's behavior and activities as well. Teacher stress is lowered as a result of decreased amounts of student conflicts that they have to handle in the course of a school day. In one report, Johnson and Johnson found that as a result of implementing a peer mediation program, the number of discipline problems that teachers had to address decreased by 60 percent. (Johnson & Johnson, 1991) In another study they found that

peer mediation was responsible for decreasing the number of conflicts that teachers had to deal with by 80 percent. Most importantly, it was found that peer mediation was directly responsible for increasing instructional time. (Daunic, Smith & Robinson, 2000) Because teachers spend less time addressing conflicts, they are able to spend more time teaching. (Guanci, 2002)

School administrators also experience positive effects as a result of having peer mediation programs in their schools. Most obvious, is the fact that they spend less time disciplining students and more time operating their schools. (Guanci, 2002) Johnson and Johnson reported a 95 percent drop in conflicts referred to the principal as a result of having a peer mediation program in the school. (Johnson & Johnson, 1995)

In general, schools benefit from having a peer mediation program within them. Guanci reported that peer mediation had positive effects on a school's climate. Schools become safer and more productive. Future violent conflict is prevented.(Guanci, 2002) Johnson and Johnson write, "...schools become orderly and peaceful places in which high-quality education can take place." (Johnson & Johnson, 1996) There are fewer fights and fewer referrals to the office. (Peterson & Skiba, 2001) Many sources site a decrease in detentions and suspensions. In a study conducted by Guanci, suspensions decreased from 18 percent to 4 percent due to the use of peer mediation. (Guanci, 2002) Fredrickson conducted a study in which there was a 45 and 70 percent reduction of suspensions in six New York City high schools that incorporated the use of peer mediation. In Minneapolis there was a 55 percent decrease in suspensions. (Fredrickson & Maruyama, 1996) Johnson and Johnson reported similar findings in addition to a reduction in absenteeism. (Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1995)

Conclusion

It is certain that more ways will be invented to manage school violence, for conflict will always be a part of human nature. Peer mediation is one of many programs that schools can use to control minor conflicts between their students. But one must optimally use a program such as peer mediation and evaluate these results along the way. Violence will not be eliminated from schools, but through proper management techniques, it can be minimized so students can engage in a school's primary purpose: learning.

Chapter 3

The Design of the Study

Research Design

This study was designed to determine the effectiveness and use of the peer mediation

program at the Galloway Township Middle School during the 2002-2003 school year. As

a result of making this determination, new innovations will be developed to improve the

program and increase its use within the school. Handling minor conflicts at a lower level,

through the peer mediation process, will create more time for the instructional staff so

they can focus their energy on teaching and so that building administrators can address

more serious offenses of the discipline code.

Using an action based research design, the instructional and administrative staff was

surveyed about various issues regarding the peer mediation process and its use in their

school. The principal, assistant principals and a random sampling of fifty staff members,

including regular and special education teachers, nurses and guidance counselors was

used to obtain this information. The data obtained from the survey results was coded and

analyzed. The goal of the data analysis was to obtain the instructional and administrative

staff's perspectives of the peer mediation program in the Galloway Township Middle

School. Its aim was to determine what tactics were used by the instructional staff to

resolve conflict, their perspectives on the types of conflicts that would be addressed by

peer mediation, their thoughts regarding its effectiveness and how it can be improved.

Knowing the staff and administrator's knowledge level regarding the peer mediation

process contributed to determining staff development needs and other ways that will improve the program.

In addition to obtaining survey information, Peer Mediation Reports were monitored for the number of times the program was used, the types of conflicts addressed, the location of the conflicts, the grade and gender of the disputants. This information was analyzed to determine frequency of use, the number of different conflicts addressed and the locations they most frequently occurred. Its results would contribute to the development of strategies to improve the program and increase its use.

Building administrators were interviewed to obtain their perceptions on the effectiveness and use of the peer mediation program. The interviews were used to obtain information about how the administrators determine if a conflict needs to be addressed by the instructional staff, the administrative staff or to peer mediation. It was also used to obtain administrators perceptions of the staff's use of the process and if the program required improvement.

The peer mediators at the middle school were interviewed to obtain their perceptions on the effectiveness and use of the peer mediation program. Since they conduct the mediations, their input would lend a first hand account of its use and any problems that may be encountered during its implementation.

Research Instrument

Data was gathered using four separate instruments. A survey was administered to the administrators and randomly selected instructional staff members of the Galloway Township Middle School. The survey consisted of ten questions that obtained the participant's perceptions of various use facets of the peer mediation process and current

methods used for dealing with conflict. The survey included one yes and no question, two open ended questions and seven Likert scale questions.

Data was also gathered from Peer Mediation Reports that were generated as a result of peer mediations. The reports were monitored for three months to determine the program's frequency of use. These reports provided data on what types of conflicts were mediated, where the conflicts occurred, whether the conflicts were resolved or not resolved and if agreements were reached and signed. Demographics consisting of grade, age and sex of the disputants were also monitored. The information obtained from the reports was summarized on a Mediation Tally Form, generated and maintained on a monthly basis by the program's advisors.

The middle school's administrators were interviewed to determine how and when they used the program, as well as their perceptions of the instructional staff's use of the program. They were asked if the program was effective in resolving minor conflicts and if the program should be improved.

Last, the peer mediators were interviewed. During the interview, the peer mediators were asked for their perceptions of the effectiveness of the program, use of the program by their teachers and peers, the referral process and ideas for improving the process.

Description of the Sample

The study was conducted at the Galloway Township Middle School located in Galloway Township, Atlantic County, New Jersey during the 2002-2003 school year. At the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year the student population was 968 seventh and eighth grade students. Under the leadership of a principal and two assistant principals, 89 professional staff members are responsible for the delivery of the schools curriculum.

A survey was conducted and information was obtained from the instructional and administrative staff. Peer Mediation Reports, completed by the peer mediators, were monitored to obtain information regarding the program. The study also included interviewing the building administrators and a random sampling of the school's peer mediators.

Survey information was obtained from the school's instructional staff who consisted of teachers, guidance counselors and nurses. Also, the administrative staff of the school, consisting of the principal and two assistant principals, was included in the survey sample. The surveys obtained the participant's knowledge about the peer mediation process, their use of the process and how they deal with minor conflicts in the school. The participants were given one week to complete and return the surveys.

Peer mediators completed Peer Mediation Reports following each mediation session. These forms included information about the students involved in a conflict, the type of conflict, place of conflict and information regarding resolution of the conflict. The peer mediation advisors tallied this information monthly on a Mediation Tally Form.

The Galloway Township Middle School has a principal and two assistant principals. Although teachers are encouraged to address minor discipline issues, the assistant principals assume primary responsibility for addressing many discipline issues that result among the students and issuing consequences for infractions of the discipline code. Occasionally, the principal will need to address discipline issues, either in consultation with the assistant principals or when they are not available. Due to their direct interactions with the students and the staff, their input regarding the use of the peer

mediation program and their perspectives regarding improvement of the program was obtained through an interview.

Students who serve as peer mediators are seventh and eighth graders selected by their teachers and the program's advisors, based upon their academic and overall character. Peer mediators were interviewed to obtain their perceptions of the program. The peer mediators were asked about the effectiveness of the program, the use of the program by their teachers and peers, the referral process, and ideas for improving the process.

Data Collection Approach

A ten-question survey was used to obtain the staff's perceptions of the peer mediation process. Surveys were administered to the school's administrative and randomly selected instructional staff. Surveys were distributed during the first week of December. They were returned within one week. The survey included two open-ended questions, one yes and no question and seven Likert scale questions. The survey covered such things as familiarity with the process as well as participant's perceptions and use of the process. The survey asked for their ideas of the use of peer mediation in the classroom and their perceptions on the effectiveness of peer mediation. Participants were asked what types of conflicts they would refer to peer mediation and what other strategies they used for solving minor conflicts between their students.

The results of the survey provided information that could be used in several ways. First, the survey provided an assessment of the staff's level of knowledge about peer mediation. This information would be valuable in planning staff inservices needed to orient staff members to the process and successfully implement the process. The staff member's perceptions of the process could also be used to assess the level of acceptance

of the process. It would be useful in identifying the types of conflicts that should be referred to peer mediation and the types of conflicts that need to be addressed by the teaching or administrative staff, as opposed to using the peer mediation process.

A tally of the Peer Mediation Reports was collected on a monthly basis from the program's advisors. The tallied information was used to determine frequency of use of the program. This information would serve as the basis for determining the success of the process. Demographics were obtained and used to determine who used the process in terms of the sex, grade level and age of the disputants. This form also provided information regarding the types of conflicts that were mediated and where the conflicts occurred. This information could provide instructional and administrative staff members with information regarding areas in the school that may be prone to producing or harboring potential outbreaks of conflict. It would show if the instructional or administrative staffs were appropriately using the process. It would also provide information about the types of conflicts that need to be addressed by the instructional or administrative staff, as opposed to using the peer mediation process.

Monitoring the Peer Mediation Reports would be valuable in planning student-training sessions. The mediator's proper use of the reporting forms would demonstrate their knowledge and proper use of the process. Currently, the middle school students participate in a two-day training session as facilitators. They teach lower grade levels of the district to become peer mediators.

An interview was conducted with the middle school's principal and assistant principals to obtain their perspectives of the peer mediation program. This interview was conducted in January, 2003. One interview topic included how the administrators

determine the need to refer students to peer mediation, as opposed to addressing the incident themselves. They were questioned about the teacher's use of the process as opposed to sending such concerns to the administrators. They were also asked about their thoughts on the effectiveness of the process and if it required any improvement. The results of this interview had implications for determining the teachers and administrators level of knowledge of the process and their present application of the forms used in reporting infractions of the discipline code.

Peer mediators were interviewed to obtain their perspectives of the peer mediation process. This short interview was completed in January 2003. The interview was used to obtain such information as the effectiveness of the process, teacher and student use of the program and popularity of the process among the schools student population. Peer mediators were also asked how the program could be improved.

The results of the interview provided a first hand account of participants experiences with the program. This information would be useful in identifying how to improve the program in the area of staff development and student training, as well as developing ways to generate greater participation of staff members and students in the peer mediation process.

Data Analysis Plan

Data was collected over a five month period using four methods. Data obtained from a survey contributed to developing ways to increase the use of the peer mediation process, integrating its use within the classroom, providing effective ways to use the process in and around the school and in developing staff inservices. Responses obtained from the surveys were analyzed for frequency of response. The results of the analysis

were used to determine the future needs of the program in order to improve its effectiveness and increase its use.

The Peer Mediation Reports were monitored for three months to determine the program's frequency of use and provide basic data regarding who used the process as well as the types and locations of the conflicts. This information directly reflected the success rate of the program. The effectiveness of the program was established through the number of conflicts mediated during the three month period. By monitoring the reports, the mediator's knowledge and proper use of the process could be established and plans for future or additional student training sessions could be established. Areas in the school that were conducive to harboring conflict could also be identified through the monitoring of these reports.

Data collected from an interview conducted with the school's administrators was used to determine how and when the administrators use the process, individually and in cooperation with the teaching staff. One goal of the interview was to obtain ideas to help improve the process from an administrative point of view.

Data collected from an interview with the peer mediators was used to determine the student's perceptions of the process, teacher use of the process and ideas for improving the program.

When forming conclusions for this study, all data were considered in establishing guidelines for implementing strategies for immediate and future plans.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Research Findings

<u>Introduction</u>

Originally, the goal of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the peer

mediation program in decreasing the number of repeat offenders of the Galloway

Township Middle School's discipline code. However, the project did not develop as it

was originally planned.

In the early phases of the study, it was discovered that in recent years the use of peer

mediation had declined at the middle school. According to middle school sources, this

decline was the result of the recent resignation of the guidance counselor who was

responsible for running the program and a lack of support from the school's assistant

principals, who preferred to handle all student disputes, no matter how minor they may

have been.

It was discovered through conversations with middle school staff, that a major

contributing factor to the return of the peer mediation program was the result of a change

in leadership and the implementation of a staff member's professional improvement plan.

The addition of a new principal and a new assistant principal was claimed to be one of

the contributing factors that brought the return of the peer mediation program back to the

middle school's culture. The addition of a new guidance counselor, whose professional

improvement plan was to reintroduce the peer mediation program back into the middle

school, was the other contributing factor that brought it back to the school. Thus, the

goal of this study concentrated on evaluating the effectiveness and use of the peer mediation program in order to determine ways that would successfully and effectively reintroduce the program back into the middle school and increase its use among its students and staff.

The Data

Data was obtained using four methods. One method included administering a survey to the instructional and administrative staff of the school. The next method involved monitoring the Peer Mediation Reports that were completed by the peer mediators after they conducted a mediation session. The third method used was an interview with the building administrators to obtain their perceptions of the peer mediation process. The last method involved interviewing the peer mediators in order to obtain their perceptions about the peer mediation process.

A survey was administered to eighty randomly selected instructional and administrative staff members of the Galloway Township Middle School in October 2002. Twenty-one surveys were completed and returned. The goal of the survey was to obtain staff member's perspectives of conflict intervention strategies, the peer mediation process, their familiarity and comfort level using peer mediation and staff inservice needs in terms of learning about peer mediation. A majority of the respondents expressed familiarity with the peer mediation process, with sixty two percent indicating that they had previously recommended peer mediation to resolve conflicts between students. Thirty eight percent indicated they had not used the process in the past.

When asked what strategies were presently used to solve minor conflicts between students, a variety of responses were obtained. Some of the responses included talking to

the students, threatening the use of a discipline referral, using a discipline referral to refer the problem to an administrator, reasoning with the student, reviewing the unacceptable behavior, using progress reports and sending the disputants to a guidance counselor. Other responses included having students avoid each other, having the students discuss the situation between them, teaching social skills, having the students set goals and develop classroom rules. This information indicated that although peer mediation is available, staff members still incorporate their own tactics when addressing minor disputes.

The survey asked respondents what minor conflicts they would recommend as suitable for peer mediation referral. The results of this question gave an indication of the staff's level of knowledge of the process and their perceptions of when they felt it needed to be used. Again, a variety of responses were received. Responses included disagreements, misunderstandings, name calling, small physical fights, rumors, rude comments, he said/she said conflicts, arguments, pushing, shoving, teasing, bullying and relationship problems.

The survey included the use of seven Likert-type questions. The goal of these questions was to obtain respondent's perceptions of such things as staff inservice requirements, peer mediation use and the effectiveness of the process.

The results of the question related to having staff inservices to learn about peer mediation demonstrated that there is a need for the inclusion of inservice programs regarding use of the process. Nineteen percent of the respondents indicated that they strongly agreed and sixty two percent agreed that inservice or training modules were needed to orient staff members to peer mediation. Nine percent disagreed to this idea.

As previously indicated, the staff was willing to use the process. When respondents were asked if they wanted to see peer mediation used to settle minor conflicts, twenty four percent strongly agreed and sixty two percent agreed to this practice. Nine percent neither agreed nor disagreed and five percent disagreed.

When asked if peer mediation was effective in reducing minor conflicts at the school, nineteen percent strongly agreed, fifty seven percent agreed, and twenty four percent neither agreed nor disagreed. While there were positive responses to this question, it appears that there was doubt regarding the process as indicated by those who neither agreed nor disagreed. This could indicate that there is a relationship between previous use and familiarity with peer mediation and its perceived effectiveness.

Two other questions were used to obtain staff member's perspectives on the effectiveness of peer mediation. When asked if peer mediation was an effective method used to decrease the amount of minor conflicts addressed by teachers, thus increasing instructional time in the classroom, nine percent strongly agreed and fifty seven percent agreed. Twenty four percent neither agreed nor disagreed and nine percent disagreed. The responses could indicate that there might be a relationship between staff member's perceptions of the process contributing to increasing instructional time and previous use of the process. This same pattern of responses was reflected in the question that asked if peer mediation was effective in reducing the number of minor conflicts addressed by building administrators. Nine percent strongly agreed and fifty seven percent agreed that it reduced the number of minor conflicts addressed by building administrators. Twenty nine percent neither agreed nor disagreed and five percent disagreed. Again, although

responses to this question were positive, the neutral or negative responses may be related to staff member's previous use of the process and their familiarity with it.

The staff member's comfort level and willingness to use the process was obtained through two of the questions. Obtaining the staff members comfort level in using the process can have implications for developing strategies to encourage staff members to use the process and for developing inservices for the staff about peer mediation. It may also denote the staff member's previous use of the process. Fourteen percent of the respondents strongly agreed and sixty two percent agreed that they were comfortable using peer mediation. Nine percent neither agreed nor disagreed and fourteen percent disagreed that they were comfortable using peer mediation. Fourteen percent strongly agreed and sixty two percent agreed that they would like to see peer mediation included as a school wide effort and incorporate its use in the classroom. Nine percent neither agreed nor disagreed and fourteen percent disagreed.

Another method that was used to determine the effectiveness and use of the peer mediation program was through the monitoring of the Peer Mediation Reports. This data provided the study with numbers that reflected actual use of the program. It also provided data regarding who used the process, the types of conflicts that were most frequently addressed and the locations where the conflicts commonly occurred. After a mediation, peer mediators complete a mediator's report that provides details of the mediation such as the mediators names, disputants names, grade, age and gender of the disputants, type and location of the conflict. An agreement is developed and written on the report and each disputant signs the agreement. These reports were monitored and summarized for three months, from October through December. The summaries of the

reports included the number of mediations that were completed, the gender of the disputants, their grade level, the type of conflict(s) mediated and the location of the conflict.

During the three-month period, twenty-nine mediations took place. October was the busiest month for total disputes mediated, with thirteen mediations conducted. Twenty of the disputants were female and thirty-eight were male. Twenty-three students were in the seventh grade and thirty-five were in the eighth grade. (See Chart 1)

CHART 1
MEDIATION USE AND DEMOGRAPHICS
OCTOBER 2002 TO DECEMBER 2002
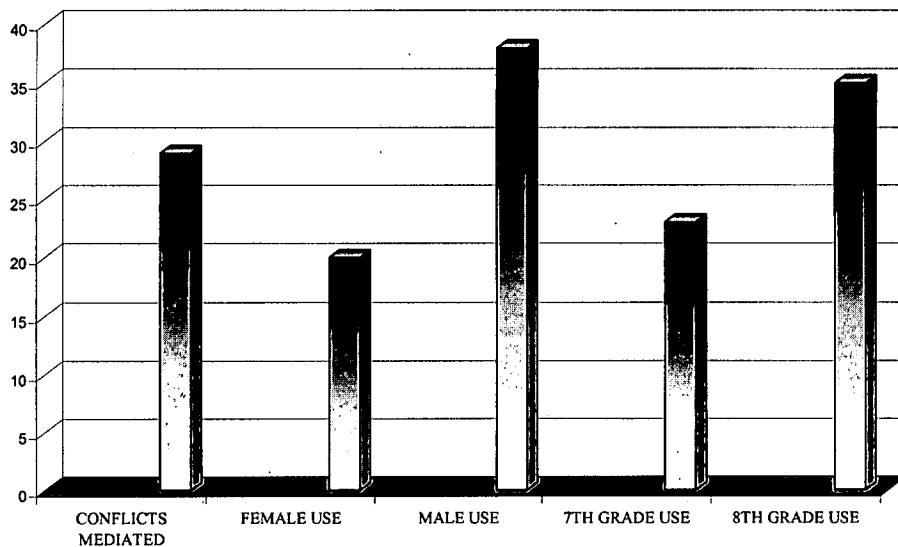
The two most frequently noted types of conflicts that were mediated included teasing, which represented twenty two percent of all conflicts, and name calling, which represented twenty percent of all conflicts. Other types of conflicts that were mediated included rumors (fourteen percent), friendship (thirteen percent), fighting (eleven percent), threats (nine percent), pushing (nine percent), and other (two- percent). (SEE Chart 2)

CHART 2
TYPES AND NUMBER OF CONFLICTS
OCTOBER 2002 TO DECEMBER 2002

CHART 2
TYPES AND NUMBER OF CONFLICTS
OCTOBER 2002 TO DECEMBER 2002
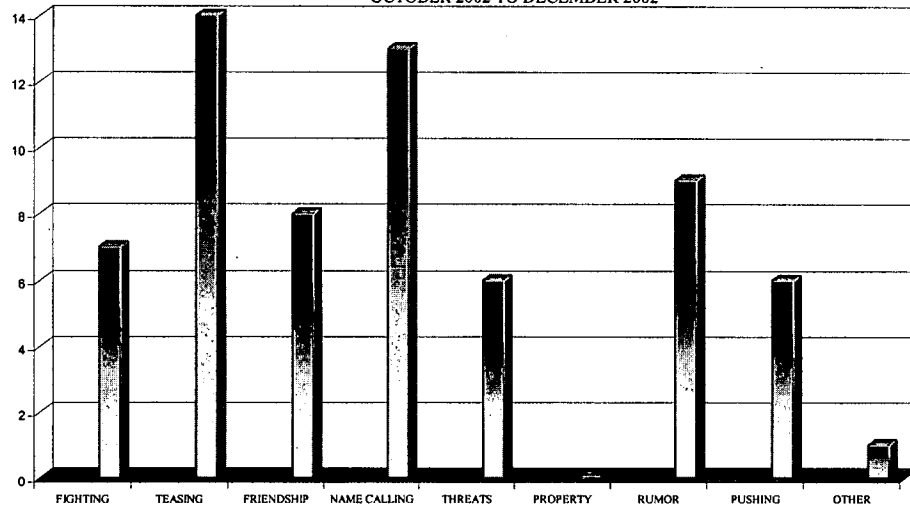
Monitoring the location of minor conflicts can have implications for identifying

conflict hot spots in the school and addressing the need for staff presence in these areas.

According to the peer mediation reports, the most frequently documented locations for

minor conflicts included the classroom and hallway. The cafeteria, bus, gym and library

followed these. (See Chart 3)

CHART 3
LOCATIONS OF CONFLICT
OCTOBER 2002 TO DECEMBER 2002

37
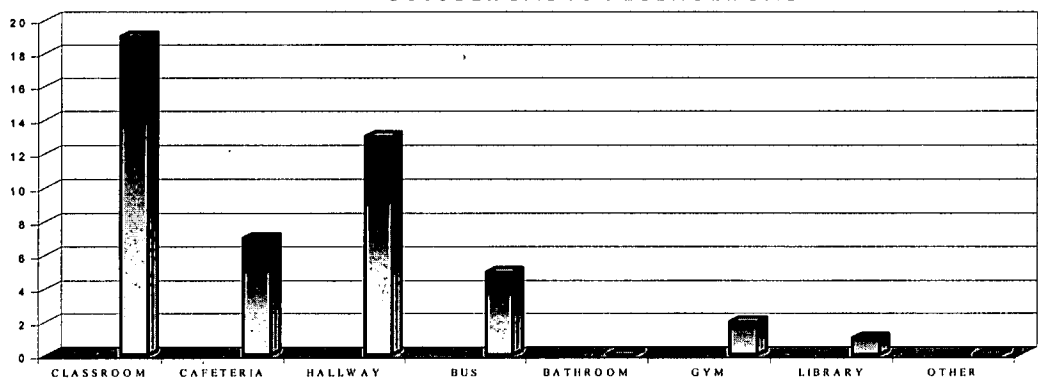
The third method used to obtain information about the effectiveness and use of the peer mediation program was through interviews conducted with the principal and assistant principals of the school. Questions were asked to the administrators to obtain their perspectives of the peer mediation program and their knowledge and use of the program. The assistant principals are predominantly responsible for addressing discipline issues. Each assistant principal is responsible for one grade level. Sometimes they are required to fill-in for each other if either of them is absent. While occasionally assuming responsibility for addressing discipline issues in the absence of either of the assistant principals, the principal is primarily responsible for handling the more serious discipline issues.

One of the questions that were asked was concerned with how the administrators determined if peer mediation needed to be used. According to the administrators, students are referred to peer mediation according to the seriousness of the offense. If a student does not pose a danger or threat to another student, the administrators refer the incident to guidance, which is responsible for obtaining peer mediation referrals and scheduling the mediation. According to one of the building's administrators, another determining factor for using peer mediation is based upon prior discipline records. Administrators review a student's previous discipline records before assigning administrative action for minor conflicts. If a student has a previous discipline history, then peer mediation is not considered as an intervention option.

Because of their close relationship with the instructional staff, the administrators were asked if they felt that the staff knows when to use peer mediation. All of the administrators felt that the teachers know when to refer students to peer mediation. One

administrator felt that administrative referrals were used as a last resort. When asked if there was evidence to support this assumption, it was discovered that records are not kept for this. Teachers are encouraged to address minor infractions of the discipline code and document their actions through the use of the school's Team/Teacher Level I Intervention Form. Referral to peer mediation is not mentioned on this form. It was one administrator's suggestion that referrals to peer mediation be included on this form. The inclusion of this type of intervention would not only offer teachers another option for addressing minor offenses, but remind them of the availability of this intervention. This could potentially decrease administrative intervention. Furthermore, this documentation could serve as another way to track the use and effectiveness of the process.

The last method used to obtain information about the use and effectiveness of the peer mediation program was through an interview with the peer mediators. Selection of the peer mediators that were to be interviewed was left up to the guidance counselor who serves as the advisor of the program. Eight "seasoned" mediators were selected for the interview. These mediators had previous mediation experience while in the fifth and sixth grades. The group of eight was divided into two groups of four in order to maintain control and avoid confusion during the interview process. The advisor was in attendance during the interviews. The goal of the interview was to obtain the perspectives of the students who have first hand experience with the peer mediation process. Their responses could help identify the problems that are encountered during the process and help in answering why teachers and students choose to use or not use the program.

The students all agreed that the program is successful in solving minor conflicts. However, some felt that it could be used more. When asked to elaborate on this, some

interesting information was revealed. It was learned that students do not want to use peer mediation to solve their minor disputes because they feel it is "stupid." The peer mediators said that they advertise the process through commercials on the school's television during announcement time and also with posters. Some of the mediators claimed that students laugh at the posters and make fun of them. They have also heard other students say that peer mediation does not always work and it is used as a way to get out of class by some students.

In response to these concerns, the mediators were asked what could be done to address these problems. The majority responded that the process was not well known by all of the students in the middle school. They said there was a need to advertise more and use more creative ways in doing it.

The mediators were asked why the middle school students say that the process does not work. One mediator replied, "It doesn't work unless the disputants work to keep it fixed." Another mediator said that sometimes students work out their differences before they get to mediation. The guidance counselor that was present during the interview added that this happens and is encouraged through the method in which mediations are scheduled. Once a referral is received, a day may sometimes pass before a mediation can be scheduled. The scheduling occurs this way to allow for disputants to cool down. Many times the disputants work out their problems before they reach mediation, which is still considered successful as far as the effectiveness of the program is concerned.

The mediators also expressed concerns about their teacher's use of peer mediation. One mediator said that teachers frequently issue Level I and Level II discipline Referrals, but they do not suggest peer mediation. When asked what could be done about this, one

mediator suggested the need for teachers and the principals to be informed about peer mediation. Perhaps they did not know it was available or perhaps they did not know how to use it or just forgot to use it. One mediator responded to this by suggesting that mediation referrals should be placed in various areas of the school to promote the program.

Immediately after completing the interview with the mediators, the program's guidance counselor was debriefed. She agreed that the group needed to advertise more. She recommended using the school's television and also distributing a written pamphlet to the school's staff regarding the use of the peer mediation process. She thought that it would help to send the peer mediators into the classrooms to give a brief talk to the students and teachers about peer mediation.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

Introduction

In recent years, violence has become a major focus of attention in all realms of our society, including our schools. Although schools are considered to be one of the safest places for children, concern lingers for maintaining this safe haven where children can learn and grow.

In order to maintain these safe environments, various approaches have been implemented through programs that are aimed at preventing or intervening incidents or behaviors that threaten the safety of schools. A frequently used program, called peer mediation, has been claimed to effectively resolve conflicts and offer numerous benefits to students, their teachers and administrative staff.

Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness and use of the peer mediation program in the Galloway Township Middle School, resulting in the identification and implementation of strategies that would effectively improve the program and increase its use.

Early in the study it was discovered that the program's use had declined in recent years. This information was obtained through conversations with the school's guidance counselors and their supervisor. No written documentation existed regarding its use or effectiveness. As a result of further dialogue with building administrators and guidance

counselors it was discovered that there was a great need for such a program at the middle school.

As indicated through a survey, instructional staff and building administrators want to see peer mediation used to settle minor conflicts in the middle school. Most of the respondents of the survey indicated that they felt comfortable using the process, but some staff indicated that they were not familiar with the process and were uncomfortable using it. Survey responses indicated that there was a need for staff inservices or training modules in order to orient the staff to peer mediation.

Through the staff survey there was a strong indication that in addition to peer mediation, the instructional staff uses a variety of strategies to solve minor conflicts among their students. All of the building administrators agreed and felt that teachers use their own strategies when dealing with minor conflicts, including referrals to the guidance counselors. Administrators believed that peer mediation should be used if the student does not pose a threat or danger to others and if they do not have a prior discipline record. They also believed that the teachers include the administrative staff as a last resort when dealing with minor conflicts. However, there was no way of proving this. Instructional staff members use two different discipline referral forms, depending on the seriousness of the offense. Level one offenses are minor infractions of the discipline code, such as general misconduct and lateness to class. Level II and III infractions are of a more serious nature, ranging from behaviors such as cheating to weapons or drug offenses. Students can receive three Level I infractions before being referred to an administrator. Until that quota is reached, teacher interventions are documented on the Level I Intervention Form. Peer mediation is not listed as an

intervention on this form. One administrator suggested that peer mediation be included on the Level I Intervention Form as a teacher intervention for certain infractions.

Peer mediator interviews indicated that they wanted to see peer mediation used more in the school. But they had concerns regarding teacher use of the process. These students felt that teachers could use the process more. According to the peer mediators, teachers tend to issue discipline referrals more frequently than peer mediation referrals. It was interesting to note that staff members and student mediators frequently mentioned the use of discipline referrals as a tactic used to address or control minor conflicts.

Throughout the study, suggestions were received for making improvements to the program. As was mentioned previously, it was expressed that there is a need for staff inservices in order to familiarize new staff members with the process and provide a review of the process to existing staff members. It was suggested that staff members need to be informed in terms of what peer mediation is and how it is used, including the types of conflicts that should be referred to the process. It was also suggested that both staff members and students need to be reminded about the program through the use of creative advertising strategies such as posters and commercials, classroom visits by the mediators and locating peer mediation referrals throughout the building, thus providing a reminder to the staff and students that the program exists.

Implications of the Study on Leadership Skills

Although this study had its own goals, the main purpose of it was to apply theory to practice. A prospective leader can not begin to imagine the emotions, the sense of pride, satisfaction, accomplishments and sometimes disappointments that are associated with

the planning and implementation of a project like this until they actually do it. These feelings are not described in the literature or the standards.

This study provided me with the skills, experiences and opportunities that until now were only a part of the literature and many courses that I completed during my educational pursuit. During the early phases of this educational pursuit, I learned that there are five issues in educational leadership that one must understand: organization, communication, leadership, decision making and change. This study allowed me to experience each of these issues and develop an understanding of them.

This study took place in an organization where I had spent three-quarters of my life, either as a student, a parent or an employee. Therefore, knowing the social, emotional, physical, financial and political components of the organization was not an issue or a concern. Although I knew the organization in which the study took place, the experience helped me to realize the importance of knowing ones organization before taking on a project as this. For instance, knowing the organization's administrators, staff, parents and students, allows a leader to know whose judgments to trust, who can be a reliable source of information and sometimes, just how far you can push the envelope.

I learned that communication is the most important skill that a leader can posses and use. Standards for school leaders indicate that a school administrator should have knowledge and understanding of effective communication. Without effective communication, it would be impossible for a school leader to apply many of the other standards to his or her practice. Lines of communication were maintained between the peer mediation advisor, her supervisor, the school's principal and myself throughout the study. Communication occurred in the form of written, verbal and electronic

correspondence. Knowing what form of communication to utilize became vital in effectively carrying out the various activities of the study.

Leaders frequently face the need to institute change, whether it is a change that effects the whole organization or a change that effects an activity within the organization. Reintroducing a program to a middle school and developing ways to improve a school program was the goal of this study. A program's effectiveness and use was in question. Change was imminent, but what types of changes were required to improve the program?

In pursuit of the goal, changes and adaptations had to be implemented several times. The ability to adapt and reformulate plans of action occurred right from the start of this study. It was discovered that the use of the peer mediation program in the middle school had declined to the point where it was approaching non-existence. This unexpected discovery created the need to formulate different goals and approaches to obtain these goals. Even after the research methods were established, it became necessary to modify those methods due to such factors as time restraints or an individual's resistance to cooperate in its implementation.

This is where decision making needs to be used. What does a leader do when their plans do not progress according to the plan or schedule? Decisions must be made, but how important is the decision, how much time and energy will be required and who is the decision affecting? All of these are valid questions that must be answered through the use of problem solving. Throughout this study, the problem solving process was used many times. Early in the study I faced such issues as deciding on a new plan of action when it was discovered that peer mediation use was at an all time low. Decisions were required regarding what research methods would effectively yield the desired results. I

needed to make decisions regarding how to share the results of the study and how to implement changes to the program that would improve it. It was discovered that sometimes, no matter what the decision, there was no way of satisfying everyone.

This study helped me to understand the issue of leadership. The literature regarding leadership frequently asks, "What makes a good leader?" There is much to be said about the definition of a leader. Some may claim that leaders must be visionary and accessible, work hard, take risks and possess honesty. Coursework helps in creating educational leaders, but going out in an educational setting and actually experiencing it contributes the most to the creation of a leader. This experience allowed me to feel leadership.

Warren Bennis mentions four leadership competencies in his book *Why Leaders Can't Lead.* His fourth competency is "...management of self, knowing one's skills and deploying them effectively." (Bennis, 1989) This study allowed me the chance to get to know myself. It brought self awareness to my abilities, strengths and weaknesses. I discovered that I had to learn who the leader was before I could lead. If one knows who they are, it helps them to know others so they can address their needs and lead them in the right direction.

Implications of the Study on Organizational Change

The goals of this study were to identify and implement strategies that would effectively improve the peer mediation program and increase its use. Reintroducing the program to the school was a change for the middle school. Its use by the middle school students had declined in recent years. Reintroducing the program brought the challenge of acquainting and reacquainting students and staff with the process. It required the cooperation of not only the students, but the teachers and administrators as well. Without

the cooperative efforts of an organization's members, programs such as this cannot effectively function. Interventions to improve the program cannot proceed smoothly.

Other changes that will result from the study will include the initiation of new methods that will further increase its use at the middle school. One idea obtained from the study included having peer mediation referrals in different locations of the building. This would remind staff and students of the availability of the process.

Reintroducing the program back into the middle school will align to the school's good citizen theme by providing students with the responsibility of directly addressing minor disputes among their peers. This in turn, promotes respect between the students and serves as a means of maintaining a safe school environment.

Results of this study have the potential to establish better methods of communication between the instructional and administrative staff. It could create improvements to the documentation procedure for interventions for discipline issues. Also, if the process is increasingly used, more time for the instructional and administrative staff could result.

Future Study

It is anticipated that there will be a continuing need to evaluate the peer mediation program to ensure that it is optimally and effectively used. It is anticipated that future needs to evaluate any strategies that will be implemented as a result of this study will be required. A constant evaluation of the use patterns of the process will provide administrators and program advisors with current data concerning frequency of use, effectiveness of use, locations of conflicts and the various conflicts that are occurring in the school.

The peer mediators suggested that peer mediation referrals should be placed in various locations of the school in order to increase the use of the program. It is important to follow-up on the effectiveness of this practice to determine if more peer mediations are occurring as a result of this idea.

In addition, future needs of the study will include planning for staff inservices and evaluating the effectiveness of those activities. Staff members, especially new staff members, need to be aware that the program exists in the school and how to use it. Inservice topics could include identifying potentially dangerous situations, the teachers role in the peer mediation process and proper procedures for referring students to peer mediation. In addition, an evaluation must be completed to establish the effectiveness of this activity.

Individual meetings with the program advisor, her supervisor and the school's principal were conducted to discuss the results of this study. There was agreement that more advertising and staff inservices are needed to promote the program. It was suggested that next year a staff presentation should be given during a school's monthly staff meeting, possibly using the peer mediators to conduct the presentation. It was also agreed that peer mediation referrals should be placed in different locations of the building in order to promote use of the program. Consideration will be given to include peer mediation as an intervention on the Level I Discipline Referral form. Further study will be needed to establish the effectiveness of these possible changes upon increasing the use of the program.

Creating and refining the methods to maintain a safe environment for the Galloway Township Middle School will not stop with the completion of this study. Peer mediation

is but one method that a school can deploy to address and prevent minor conflicts that can lead to tragic acts of violence. While violence will not be eliminated from schools, initiatives like peer mediation can minimize the conflicts so that students can learn.

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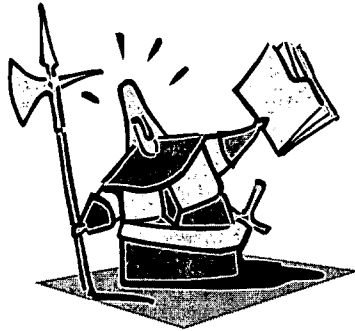
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Appendix A

Instrumentation

PEER MEDIATION SURVEY

Dear GTMS Staff Member,

Greetings from your administrative intern who is requesting, yet another survey from you!

My major focus of study (the project that I will use for my master's thesis) involves evaluating the GTMS Peer Mediation Program. Your assistance is requested in completing a survey for this project. Although your participation is voluntary, your responses will significantly contribute to the goals of my study and will also help our guidance counselors to successfully deliver the program at GTMS.

Your mission, if you choose to accept, (Do you hear music??) is to kindly complete the attached survey. Please be honest when answering the questions to the survey. Individual responses will be kept confidential; however, tallied responses may be shared with others.

After completing the attached survey, please return it to me via the GTMS main office NO LATER THAN MONDAY DECEMBER 9TH.

Thank you very much for your cooperation and your time! I appreciate your help.

Sincerely,

PEER MEDIATION SURVEY

1. What strategies do you presently use to solve minor conflicts between students?

_____

_____

2. I have recommended peer mediation to resolve minor conflicts between my students in the past.

                YES   NO

3. Inservice or training modules are needed to orient the staff about peer mediation and it's use.

| strongly agree | agree | neither agree nor disagree | disagree | strongly disagree |

4. I like to see peer mediation used to settle minor conflicts between the students at GTMS.

| strongly agree | agree | neither agree nor disagree | disagree | strongly disagree |

5. Peer mediation is an effective way to reduce minor conflicts at GTMS.

| strongly agree | agree | neither agree nor disagree | disagree | strongly disagree |

6. I feel comfortable using peer mediation to solve minor conflicts between my students.

| strongly agree | agree | neither agree nor disagree | disagree | strongly disagree |

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7. Peer mediation is an effective method used in decreasing the amount of minor conflicts that teachers need to address, thus increasing instructional time in the classroom.

strongly   agree   neither agree   disagree   strongly
  agree   nor disagree   disagree

8. Peer mediation is an effective method used in reducing the number of minor conflicts often addressed by building administrators.

strongly   agree   neither agree   disagree   strongly
  agree   nor disagree   disagree

9. I would like to see peer mediation included as a school-wide effort and incorporate its use within the classroom.

strongly   agree   neither agree   disagree   strongly
  agree   nor disagree   disagree

10. What types of minor conflicts would you recommend as suitable for peer mediation referral/intervention?

_____

_____

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