The effectiveness of the Peer Mediation Program in improving the atmosphere in the school and reducing violent acts in the school setting

Robert Milavsky
Rowan University
The Effectiveness of the Peer Mediation Program in Improving the Atmosphere in the School and Reducing Violent Acts in the School Setting

by

Robert Milavsky

A Masters Thesis

Submitted on partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree in The Graduate School of Rowan University
April 10, 2000

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved 4/15/00
Abstract

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the impact mediation has in reducing violence in the school setting. Through the use of survey instrumentation, the researcher will gather feedback from disputants regarding the effectiveness of the program in resolving their problems. Along with a survey instrument, the researcher will conduct monthly mediation meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to gather information from the mediators in regards to both effective and ineffective mediations and ways to improve the total program.

Survey instruments will go out to all individuals participating in a mediation. It will be distributed approximately two weeks after the mediation to give time for the agreements to take shape. Once the surveys are returned to the researcher, they will be used to gather information regarding the effectiveness of resolving the mediated conflict.

Conclusions from the study indicate that, by in large, most students view the mediation process and the role of the mediator as positive. Almost one third, twelve out of 37 indicated they would have acted out physically, resulting in a fight had the mediation not been available.
Mini-Abstract

Robert Milavsky

The Effectiveness of the Peer Mediation Program in Improving the Atmosphere in the School and Reducing Violent Acts in the School Setting
2000
Dr. Gini Doolittle
Educational Administration

The purpose of the study was to determine the effectiveness of mediations in reducing acts of violence in the school setting. Results concluded that 92% of students who responded to the survey instrument reported that the mediation experience was somewhat successful or very successful in resolving their conflict. Furthermore, almost one-third of students responded that they would have acted out physically if mediation had not been available.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ................................................ ii

Chapter 1: Introduction: Focus of the Study ........................ 1
  Purpose of the Study .............................................. 2
  Definitions .......................................................... 3
  Limitations of the Study ......................................... 4
  Setting of the Study .............................................. 4
  Significance of the Study ....................................... 11
  Organization of the Study ....................................... 11

Chapter 2: Review of Literature ....................................... 13

Chapter 3: Design of the Study ....................................... 25
  Overview and Purpose .......................................... 25
  Context of the Study ........................................... 27
  Methodology ....................................................... 29
    Nature of Action Research ................................. 29
    Observations and Data Collection Techniques ............. 32
    Outcomes ....................................................... 35

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings ..................................... 36
  Introduction ....................................................... 36
  Research Findings ............................................... 38
  Conclusions ....................................................... 44

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications and Further Study ............... 46
  Conclusions ....................................................... 46
List of Tables

Table 1: Bellmawr Borough Population .................................................. 6
Table 2: Runnemede Borough Population ................................................ 7
Table 3: Gloucester Township Population ............................................. 8
Table 4: Ethnic Diversity ..................................................................... 9
Table 5: Median Family Income ............................................................. 10
Table 6: Unemployment Percentages ..................................................... 10
Table 7: Action Research Model ............................................................. 30
Table 8: Survey Question Number One ................................................ 39
Table 9: Survey Question Number Two ................................................ 39
Table 10: Survey Question Number Three ........................................... 40
Table 11: Survey Question Number Four ............................................. 41
Acknowledgments

Robert Frank Milavsky would like to express sincere appreciation and gratitude to the following individuals for their contribution to this project:

Mr. Ralph Ross, Vice Principal at Highland Regional High School and mentor, for his experience, guidance, support, and understanding during the internship.

Mrs. Bonnie Lewis, secretary for Mr. Ralph Ross, for her expertise, guidance, and help throughout the internship.

The faculty and staff at Highland Regional High School for their support and understanding throughout the internship.

Dr. Gini Doolittle, University Advisor of my thesis, for her guidance, support, expertise and willingness to make me a better student.

Ron and Pat Milavsky, my parents, for making me the person I am, and for their love, support, encouragement, and confidence in me to fulfill my goals.

Dawn Milavsky, my wife, for her never-ending support, love, understanding, and positive reinforcement throughout my internship.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Frontier High School, February 1996, three people killed, many others injured. Columbine High School, April 1999, fifteen people killed, countless others injured. All involved in education can relate to the onslaught of violence in the school setting. But what is being done to effectively deal with violent outrages in the school. Parents blame the teachers, teachers blame the parents and ultimately little if anything is accomplished. The incident at Frontier High School in Moses Lake, Washington was not the first incident of violence in the school setting and Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado would not be the last. Student harassment toward each other and alienation must be stopped and dealt with effectively.

Many schools facing problems with student and school violence have turned to a program called Peer Mediation. Peer Mediation allows students to sit and talk about differences they may be having with another student thus coming to some formalized agreements so that no further incidents of violence will occur. Its primary objective is to allow students to work out their problems with other students. Mediators help guide them toward positive agreements and resolutions to their problems.

The intern will focus the study on the effectiveness of Peer Mediation in dealing with violence in the school setting, and to what degree, Peer Mediation plays in subsiding potentially violent outrages by students. The use of survey research will be conducted on all disputants that go through the mediation process to see if the mediation process effectively deals with their problems. The obvious need for some type of communication
is necessary for students to voice their concerns. The mediation process is an effective tool in helping disgruntled students better understand their emotional outbursts.

Too often students engage in a heated argument and take out their aggression by fighting or worse, pulling a knife or gun on someone. This occurs everywhere. It occurred at Moses Lake High School in Washington, Columbine High School in Colorado and it could occur at Highland High School in Blackwood, New Jersey. The mediation process will hopefully fill this communication void and allow for an outlet where students sit and discuss problems they are having with another student.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to evaluate what impact mediation has on individuals going through the mediation process and determine using a panel study, the long-range effectiveness of the Peer Mediation Program in handling student issues at Highland Regional High School. The use of Peer Mediation is in place to alleviate stressful situations that students must deal with on a daily basis. It is an avenue for students to sit down and talk about problems that are having with other individuals.

The educational community at Highland Regional High School has taken extensive steps to insure the care, welfare, safety, and security of all its members in the school setting through workshops devoted to teacher understanding and improvements in the training of students to better deal with conflict situations. The focus of the educational goals and objectives has revolved around improving the school atmosphere.

Students can successfully handle confrontational situations be taking control and becoming empowered individuals. Empowerment is a vital part of the mediation process.
Students work out their problems, not as a result of an administrator making them, but by
taking on the responsibility of developing agreements to which they feel confident and
secure. Students can reroute their aggression, which has the potential to become physical
in nature and turn it into a learning experience. Whereby, they ultimately feel a sense of
ownership and empowerment.

Building on past mediations, the intern will gather data, distribute survey
research, and implement an action research plan to improve the quality of the peer
mediation program, and analyze the results on the study. Upon gathering data results, the
intern will determine if the mediation process improves the school environment.
Included in this study, the intern will determine the effectiveness of the peer mediation
process in solving disputants’ disagreements.

Definitions

The following definitions will be used as an integral part of the project study, and
are pertinent to the comprehension of the project process.

Conflict: That which results when two or more individuals are at a disagreement
over a topic.

Conflict Resolution: A source of mediation whereby two individuals work to
resolve a problem they are having with one another.

Confrontation: Two or more individuals usually referred to as disputants have a
conflict that results in either a verbal or physical altercation.

Crisis Intervention Programs: Programs designed to work individuals through
problems they are having using mediation skills.

Disputants: Name given to an individual who is in need of mediation.

Empowerment: A feeling of ownership that disputants have when they have gone
through the mediation process. An increase of self-esteem and character that is displayed
once the mediation is resolved.

Mediation: A process which two or more individuals, or disputants, go through to
help them resolve their problems.
Mediators: Individuals who upon going through training sessions help disputants work through their problems.

Peer Mediation: The process of helping disputants through a conflict they are having using peers to mediate the problem.

Win-Win Agreements: When mediators work with disputants so that both disputants feel as though they are getting something out of the mediation.

Limitations of the Study

The intern’s project is to determine the effectiveness of the Peer Mediation program at Highland Regional High School and determine if disputants feel a sense of empowerment and resolution after having gone through the process. As with all projects of this nature, there are certain limitations to the project.

One possible limitation to this project is that the study is conducted at Highland Regional High School involving only students at the school. As a result, the conclusions drawn cannot be generalized to include all schools. Only students that use the mediation process will receive the survey questionnaire, thus taking part in the study. A third limitation is a result of confidentiality. All matters regarding the mediation cannot be discussed outside of a generalized context.

Setting of the Study

The Black Horse Pike Regional School District is comprised of three municipalities: Bellmawr Borough, Runnemede Borough, and Gloucester Township. These three municipalities form the north east corner of Camden County. These communities are located just a few miles from the Delaware River. This area was among the earliest settled in Colonial Southern New Jersey because of the easy availability by water for transportation.
Bellmawr Borough, Runnemede Borough and Gloucester Township were once part of the “Irish Tenths,” an arbitrary division of the land during the early colonial times running from the Delaware River to the Atlantic Ocean. This area was particularly important because Gloucester Township’s community of Chews Landing was at the headwaters of a navigable stream flowing west to the Atlantic Ocean near what is now Atlantic City. Consequently, one of the earliest settlements in New Jersey grew at this spot. On the other hand, Bellmawr and Runnemede were part of the Old Center Township until 1929. They became independent boroughs following an action of the New Jersey Legislature.

During the late 18th century the area consisted of a dozen huge farms. In the 1920’s improvements to the Black Horse through Bellmawr, Runnemede and Gloucester Township provided a direct link between Philadelphia and Atlantic City. Many families began to settle in the area and communities began to grow. As new families settled in these communities, industry and commerce flourished. Eventually, construction brought the New Jersey Turnpike, bridges, freeway system, and rail lines.

Bellmawr covers approximately 3.02 square miles of land area. At its peak in 1970, Bellmawr’s population totaled 15,618. In the last two decades the population has declined to 12,603. Bellmawr Borough is the northern most of the three district municipalities. Even with two decades of decline Bellmawr is estimated to be the tenth most populous municipality in Camden County. The largest population shift has been accompanied by the nature of the population. In 1970 the median age was 25.5 with 28% of the population being school-aged and 4% over 65 years old. By 1990 the median age
was 35.5. The school-aged population dropped to 16% and 10% of the population was over 65 years old. See Table 1 below.

![Bellmawr Borough Change in Student and Senior Population](image)

Table 1

The town of Bellmawr is predominately white. As of 1989 African Americans totaled 0.9 %, Hispanic Americans totaled 1.6 % and other races totaled 1.4 % of the population (See Table 4a on page 9). The number of households in the Borough of Bellmawr was 4,679 with 59% owned by married couples. The average household contained 2.5 persons. At the time of the 1990 census, the housing in Bellmawr consisted of 2,981 single family detached houses, 800 single family attached units, 975 multi-family units, and 33 other units. Housing growth is limited in Bellmawr Borough because of the lack of vacant land. An average of six building permits was issued per year prior to 1990.

Runnemede Borough has Bellmawr Borough on the north and Gloucester Township on the south. Runnemede is 2.0 square miles and is the smallest of the three towns that make up the Black Horse Pike School District. In 1950 the population consisted of 4,127 residents. The population continued to climb until the 1970s when it
reached its highest population of 10,475. Since that time the population has decreased to 8,930 residents. This decrease occurred at the same time as Bellmawr's decline.

As with Bellmawr Borough the change in population of Runnemede Borough was accompanied by a change in the age characteristics. During the 1970s the average age was 27 and 25% of the population was school-aged. Senior citizens totaled 6%. By the 1990 census Runnemede's median age of 34 increased seven years. School-aged children totaled 16% and senior citizens more than doubled to 14%. See Table 2 below.

![Runnemede Borough Change in Student and Senior Population](image)

Table 2

The ethnic makeup of Runnemede resembles the town of Bellmawr with 95.9% of the population white and 2.7% of the population African American (See Table 4b on page 9). There are 3,420 households in Runnemede. The housing trend in Runnemede reflects a stable community because of the lack of developable land.

Gloucester Township is the southernmost of the towns. The township consists of 23.14 square miles of land. The area of Gloucester Township is 4.6 times the combined land area of Bellmawr and Runnemede and is the fourth largest municipality in Camden County. According to the 1950 census, the population of Gloucester Township consisted...
of 7,984 residents. With continual development and growth, Gloucester Township now has 58,004 residents. This is 2.7 times the combined population of Bellmawr and Runnemede.

Gloucester Townships population has also experienced the same aging characteristics as Bellmawr and Runnemede but to a lesser degree. In 1970 the median age of Gloucester Township was 28 by 1990 the median age moved a few tenths to 28.3. The school aged population decreased from 26.3% in 1970 to 21.7% in 1990. Senior citizen levels decreased from 7.1% in 1970 to 6.7% in 1990. See Table 3 below.

The housing trend in Gloucester Township directly reflects the population increase. In 1970 there were 7,323 households in the township. By 1990 that number exploded to 19,893 households. During the 1990s the housing and population growth has slowed because of the scarcity of land. The racial makeup of Gloucester Township is 91.2% white, 6.1% African American and 2.7% other races (See Table 4c on page 9).
Ethnic Diversity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>Chart a</th>
<th>Chart b</th>
<th>Chart c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bellmawr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runnemede</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

Triton Regional High School draws students from Bellmawr, Runnemede and Gloucester Township. Highland Regional High School draws students exclusively from the Gloucester Township municipality. The median family income for Bellmawr was $20,797 in 1979 and increased to $39,253 when the last census was conducted in 1989 a percentage change of 88.7%. Runnemede’s median family income went from $19,697 in 1979 to $39,370 in 1989 a percentage change of 99.9%. Gloucester Township’s median family income went from $22,638 in 1979 to $45,694 in 1989 a percentage change of 101.8%. (See Table 5 on page 10).
Table 5

Unemployment percentages in the three districts are comparable. Bellmawr has the highest unemployment percentage at 5.2%. Gloucester Township is the second highest at 5.1% and Runnemede has an unemployment percentage of 4.8%. The three communities in the Black Horse Pike School District are all below the Camden County unemployment percentage of 5.9%. These figures represent the unemployment percentages from the 1989 census and pertain to all people ages 16 and over. (See Table 6 below.)
Bellmawr, Runnemede, and Gloucester Township form the Black Horse Pike Regional School District. The district provides education to grades 9 through 12. Each of the three towns has their own school district for grades K through 8.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the project is three-fold. First, it will allow for an understanding of the effectiveness of the peer mediation program. The analyzed data will be used to better understand what students want from the mediation and just how effective the mediation process was in meeting their needs. Second, the process empowers students to develop mediation skills including listening, understanding, and perhaps, making consolations for the betterment of both individuals involved. Finally, through the implementation of survey research and ongoing action research, the researcher will develop a better understanding of the effectiveness of the mediation program thus improving the learning environment at Highland Regional High School.

An important aspect of the mediation process is for disputants to work toward a win-win situation. To do this, both disputants have to feel success when they leave the mediation room even though one person may be totally right and the other totally wrong. The individual who is wrong has to feel as though they were not stripped of their dignity.

Organization of the Study

This project will include survey research that will be distributed to all individuals going through the mediation process. Chapter two will contain the review of the
literature and related information so that the intern will better understand the nature of past studies. Chapter three will discuss the design of the study which includes a description of the development and design of the research instruments, sampling techniques used in the study, a description of the data collection, and a description of the data analysis plan. Chapter four will represent the research findings and chapter five will include conclusions, implications and any further studies being conducted in the area of peer mediation.
Conflicts among students in United States schools result in destructive outcomes with alarming frequency. In many schools, outbreaks of violent behavior and the presence of weapons are all too common, with estimates indicating that over 25,000 handguns enter schools daily. A quarter of all high school seniors in 1993 reported being threatened with violence (Johnson, 1995). Conflict is a normal, natural part of everyday life. The word conflict has its roots in the Latin word conflictus, meaning "striking together" (Trevalski, 1994). What must be understood is that conflict does not have to have negative connotations surrounding it. Depending on how conflict is resolved will determine its ultimate outcome. Conflict can be handled in three ways. The first is to ignore it. By ignoring conflict, one can never fully overcome his or her fears and anxieties. The second method of dealing with conflict is confronting the opposing party. Confrontation usually results in either violent outcomes or dissatisfaction for both parties because a resolution was never reached. The third method is to mediate the conflict. In a mediation, both parties or disputants come to a resolution where they talk about their concerns and arrive at an agreement that allows both individuals to feel rewarded and empowered. It is this mediation process that has become the focal point of educators and schools throughout the United States.

Extensive data illustrate that instances of violence, including bias-related violence and disciplinary problems in schools around the country, are severely interfering with the learning environment of students. Nearly one million adolescents between the ages of 12 and 19 are victims of violent crimes each year (Hechinger, 1994). Almost 300,000 high school students are attacked physically each month and one in five student in grades 9 through 12 carries a weapon to school (Meek, 1992). The question remains, does peer mediation effectively improve the atmosphere in the school and reduce violent acts in the
Describing and Defining Peer Mediation

To create a safer atmosphere at school and to contribute to broader efforts within the community to reduce violence, a large but unknown number of United States schools have implemented projects to reduce interpersonal violence among youth. Estimates place the number of schools adopting some form of violence prevention at more than 5,000. Although other terms are sometimes used for the projects, they commonly are referred to as conflict resolution and peer mediation (Powell, 1995).

Mediation is defined as a voluntary process in which those involved in a dispute jointly explore and reconcile their differences. The mediator has no authority to impose a settlement. His or her strength lies in the ability to assist the disputants in resolving their own differences. The mediated dispute is settled when the disputants themselves reach what they consider a workable solution (Kaufman, 1992). Peer mediation is an effective approach to youth violence. In general, these programs establish a system for students to settle their differences away from adults, without resorting to weapons or violence (Peart, 1994).

Mediation does involve a mediator. Student mediators learn methods to deflate small conflicts. First, they get the disputants alone in a quiet room, away from friends who could instigate further conflict. Without passing judgment, the mediators listen to both sides of a dispute and get the students to talk through their differences in a calm, rational manner. When the mediation is over, the mediator and the students write out and sign an agreement that lists the conditions that will keep the parties from arguing again (Peart, 1994).
The mediator is a non-bias, non-judgmental figure whose only concern is to achieve harmony between the two disputants. The main goal of the mediator is to develop a "win-win" solution that mutually satisfies the most important interest of both parties and leaves the parties feeling satisfied with the agreement and the way the mediation was conducted (Zubek, 1992). Mediators are trained to deal with disputants who are at an impasse. The mediator must effect a "change in the problem." Sometimes, however, the change is merely in the ways the disputants see the problem. In pure form, according to Kaufman (1992), a mediator accomplished change in disputants perceptions in three basic ways:

* by supplying information (factual or normative).
* by transferring information among the disputants.
* by altering procedures of the negotiation process, including the physical environment in which the negotiation takes place.

Mediation addresses these techniques and offers several strengths to a youth development and violence prevention program. It is particularly useful in developing problem solving and reasoning skills and in instilling positive attitudes and beliefs. Students, particularly aggressive youth, may benefit from understanding alternatives to the win-lose adversarial approach. Mediation helps students become more aware of, and comfortable with, creating win-win situations using the legal system. Mediations and negotiations can be performed successfully by individuals. Mediation also provides the message that third parties, such as government, do not always have to be the resolver of conflicts (Pereira, 1997).

There are numerous programs available which complement a school's peer mediation program. Although structurally different, the objective is consistent; to improve the school setting, reduce violent acts and insure a safe environment for all students. The following are example of crisis intervention programs. First, whatever is illegal outside of
school cannot be treated as if it were not a crime inside of school. Second, the process of school management and discipline is more important than the outcomes. Reinforcing alternatives to violent behaviors is a necessity for there to be success in the school setting. Finally, problems of school violence are not intrusions on the school program; they are an integral part of the school program (Bodine, 1998).

Another orientation toward conflict resolution that is specific to the educational context is Kreidler’s concept of the peaceable classroom, an environment that possesses the following five qualities:

* **Cooperation.** Where children learn to work together and trust, help and share with each other.
* **Communication.** Where children learn to observe carefully, communicate accurately, and listen sensitively.
* **Tolerance.** Where children learn to respect and appreciate people's differences and to understand prejudice and how it works.
* **Positive Emotional Expression.** Where children learn to express feelings, particularly anger and frustration, in ways that are not aggressive or destructive, and children learn self control.
* **Conflict Resolution.** Where children learn the skills of responding creatively to conflict in the context of a supportive, caring community (Girard, 1996).

**Rationale for the Implementation of Peer Mediation**

The main goal of all the programs is built around the premise of developing a better working environment in schools which includes caring for the safety, welfare and security of all individuals involved. Schools alone cannot change a violent society. Schools can, however:
* stop making the problems worse.
* teach alternative to violence.
* teach students to act responsibly in social settings.
* teach students to understand and accept the consequences of their behavior.
* improve the quality of learning (Bodine, 1998).

As a result, Peer Mediation has rooted itself into the educational environment. Promoters of the program rave about its success and see it as a solution to resolving some of the violence in the school setting. Those opposed look at the school systems and want to know why we need to train, educate and promote such a program. Statistics tell of its need and of its place within the school system.

Concern about violence in schools has been increasing, and, correspondingly, conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs have been proliferating. While there are numerous methodological and conceptual problems with the research on conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, the current evidence, according to Johnson (1996) indicates that:

* conflicts among students do occur frequently in schools;
* untrained students by and large use conflict strategies that create destructive outcome by ignoring the importance of their ongoing relationships;
* conflict resolution and peer mediation programs do seem to be effective in teaching students integrative negotiation and mediation procedures;
* after training, students tend to use these conflict strategies, which generally leads to constructive outcomes; and
* students' success in resolving their conflicts constructively tends to result in reducing the numbers of student-student conflicts referred to teachers and administrators, which, in turn, tends to reduce suspensions.
Violence resulting from disputes and bias-related incidences including racism, sexism, or other forms of prejudice among students is a significant problem with long-term effects. Violence effects learning, quality of life, and the community at large. Children who avoid school in fear for their personal safety, carry weapons for protection, or rely exclusively on adult figures to provide solutions may lack the skills needed to resolve conflicts or may perceive their only alternative is an aggressive or adversarial confrontation aimed at producing "winners" and "losers" (Benken, 1998).

Students must be aware that they could become a target for violence in the school. Statistics show that youth experience violence in places familiar to them, such as in and around schools. According to the National Crime Victimization Surveys for 1985 to 1988, 37% of violent victimization of youth between 12 and 15 years of age occurred at school. There is a substantial increase in the violence victimization rates of adolescents. There were more than 1.55 million violent crimes committed against youth ages 12 to 17 in 1992, a 25% increase since 1988 (Pereira, 1997).

Two reports on youth violence published by the National Institute of Justice indicated the extent of violence in the schools. In one study of inner-city high schools in four states, 80% of student respondents reported that other students carried weapons to school, while 66% of respondents said they personally knew someone who carried weapons to school. In a second study of students from nine high schools, 39% reported being in a situation that might have lead to a fight in the previous week. Nineteen percent reported carrying a gun at least once during a six month period (Pereira, 1997).

The American Psychological Association Commission of Violence and Youth (APA), in its 1993 report titled, Violence and Youth: Psychology’s Response, confirms the evidence that the intensity of violence involving children and youth has increased dramatically, and that children are becoming involved in violence at an early age. The APA report includes recommendations for school-based primary prevention programs. It
suggests that school-based programs which promote cognitive and social skills, such as social perspective-taking, alternative solution generation, self-esteem enhancement, peer-negotiation skills, problem-solving skills, and anger management could have a greater impact than is presently the case in preventing violence (Pereira, 1997). School administrators, counselors and teachers are responding to these issues by implementing peer mediation and conflict resolution programs as a strategy of choice to resolve conflict, control discipline problems, recognize and appreciate cultural differences, and ultimately reduce violence in our nation's schools (Benken, 1998).

Results Indicating the Effectiveness of Peer Mediation Programs

Not only does Peer Mediation address the problem of violence and promote unity within the school setting, those students trained in Peer Mediation and those using it to resolve problems, improve their self-esteem and are better able to handle conflict. Several studies have documented that conflict resolution and peer mediation training result in increased self-esteem. Psychological health, self-esteem, self-regulation, and resilience, the ability to manage conflict constructively, is an essential aspect of psychosocial health and adjustment. Without the ability to manage conflicts, children can easily become socially isolated, which is associated with behavioral maladjustment.

Deutsch (1992) reported an investigation on the effects of conflict resolution and cooperative learning training in three New York City alternative schools that specialized in students at risk. A student survey was given at different times during the training, systematic observations and interviews were conducted. Students improved in the ability to manage their conflicts and experienced increased social support and less victimization from others. This improvement in their relations with others led to increased self-esteem as well as a decrease in feelings of anxiety and depression and more frequent positive
feelings of well-being. The higher self-esteem, in turn, produced a greater sense of personal control over their own fates. The increases in their sense of personal control and in their positive feelings of well-being led to higher academic performance (Johnson, 1996). Also, teachers see student as having improved self-esteem as a result of a conflict resolution and peer mediation program.

Further evidence indicates that building conflict resolution and mediation skills develops a higher self-esteem and self-confidence. Roush and Hall (1993) found that eight middle schools students who took an elective course in conflict resolution skills showed a significant increase in self-concept. In addition, Burrell and Vogl (1990) reported that students felt high self-approval for being mediators because of the satisfaction they received from helping their peers resolve problems. Furthermore, Maxwell (1989) pointed out that peer mediation programs are really about engaging students in self-regulation. Self-regulation is fostered in students when they are given the opportunity to participate in decisions relating to their own lives. Involvement in decision making develops responsibility, self-discipline, and self-directed behavior. Finally, children who were identified as resilient (capable of recovering from a stressful event) were characterized by the ability to resolve conflict in a problem-solving way (Johnson, 1996).

Violence is learned and can be combated through teaching alternatives. If students are involved in a conflict, they need to know that there are options besides violence. The goal of the peer mediation program is to show students how to find these alternatives (Hechinger 1994). Many studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of peer mediation in reducing discipline problems and violent acts in the school setting. An independent study in 1990 revealed that 71% of teachers participating saw a reduction in fighting in their classrooms, 66% said verbal put-downs decreased and 78% said caring increased (NEA Today, 1998). The Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management (1993) compared two K-8 suburban schools, one with and one without a
conflict resolution program. In the treatment school, students were more willing to stop a fight, were less likely to think people deserved to be beaten up, were more willing to try to stop friends from fighting, and had more confidence in their ability to help themselves and others solve problems (Johnson, 1996).

A peer mediation project, supported by the Injury Prevention and Control Program, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Department of Criminal Justice at Coppin State College and the Project BRAVE (Baltimoreans Reducing All Violent Encounters) (1992), was implemented at one elementary school in Baltimore. This school was selected because it is located in a neighborhood with a high incidence of drug trafficking and violence. During the two year study of the project, student mediators helped resolve 311 incidents, which included threats and harassment, personal property disputes, name calling, line cutting, rumors and gossip, and physical contact such as kicking, pushing, or bumping. Disputants signed agreements in 93% of the incidents. Follow-up by the project coordinator indicated that 95% of the agreements were honored for the remainder of the school year. Desirable changes for the entire school were recorded after implementation of the project. Faculty attendance increased from 92% to 95%, and student attendance from 91% to 93%. Disciplinary suspensions fell from four the year before the project to one during each of the two project years. Referrals to the principal’s office declined from 103 before the project to 93 and then 80 during it. Consequently, there were fewer incidents of fighting, hitting and name-calling (Powell, 1995).

In an elementary school, Johnson, Johnson, and Dudley (1992) reported an 80% decrease in the frequency of student-student conflicts that teachers had to manage and a reduction in principal referrals to zero in the classes participating in the conflict resolution and peer mediation program. Meek (1992) evaluated a conflict resolution program in New York City by conducting a survey of 130 teachers and found that 71% reported a
reduction of physical violence in the classroom, 66% heard less name calling and fewer verbal put-downs, and 69% saw increased student willingness to cooperate with each other. He also reported a 50% decline in student assaults. Roush and Hall (1993), in a study of 38 fourth graders, 55 fifth graders, and 52 sixth graders, who participated in a conflict resolution program, found that the number of misconduct slips handed out on the playground decreased significantly. Responses by teachers to a questionnaire on peer mediation’s effectiveness indicated that when the mediator were on the playground, there was a noticeable decrease in arguing among students and an improved playground climate (Johnson, 1996).

A conflict resolution project in a middle school in Orange County, North Carolina, was evaluated from the 1991-1992 school year to the 1992-1993 school year. The school has a population of more than 700 students, approximately 29% of whom are members of racial or ethnic minority; 21% qualify for a free or reduced-cost lunch. During the time of the evaluation, referrals of sixth grade students to the principal’s office dropped from 150 to 27, in-school suspensions of sixth grade students decreased from 52 to 30, and out-of-school suspensions decreased from 40 to 1. In-school suspensions for the entire school did increased by 25%, but out-of-school suspensions decreased by 26% (Powell, 1995).

In secondary schools, Millhauser (1989) reported that a peer mediation program reduced the drop-out rate. Also, McDonald and Moriarty (1990) reported a reduction in the suspension rate. Cheatham (1989) reported a 46% to 70% reduction in suspensions for fighting. Likewise, Sadalla (1990) reported a 75% drop in the number of incidents referred to the principals and Schumpf (1991) reported that more than 200 disputes per year were resolved with a 96% to 100% success rate. Furthermore, In Greenwald and Johnson’s (1987) study, teachers and administrators reported that a peer mediation program had a great deal of impact in reducing violence. Further evidence indicates the effectiveness of peer mediation programs, Meek (1992) reported a 50% decline in student
assault and Conbere (1994) reported that in the first year of the implementation of a peer mediation program in a high school in Minneapolis, the number of suspensions dropped from 459 to 205, and the number of violent incidents dropped from 107 to 51. Similar results from McCormick (1988) reported that in one year of a peer mediation program there was a 51% decrease in self-reported use of aggression by students and a 47% decrease in officially reported use of aggression and Stern and Van Slyck (1986) reported that 74% of disputants reported that they would have had a fight if they had not been referred to mediation (Johnson, 1996).

Further evidence indicates the effectiveness of mediation programs. Sherrod (1995) conducted a statewide survey of high schools in California and obtained a 74% response from the "administrator in charge of student discipline." Over 70% of the respondents indicated that student peer conflict management programs reduced the incidence of student suspensions, and more than one third perceived the programs as reducing the frequency of student expulsions. A majority of the respondents also perceived the peer conflict management programs as reducing school violence, classroom disruptions and repeat referrals and suspensions. Davis (1986) reported on the School Mediators Alternative Resolution Team in a high school in Long Island City in Queen, New York. During a two-year period, 260 disputes involving over 620 students were resolve through mediation. Follow-up interviews showed that 90% of the mediated agreements were upheld. Suspensions for fighting dropped from 63 in the 1982-1983 school year to 34 in the 1983-1984 school year to 18 in the 1984-1985 school year (Johnson, 1996).

Umbreit (1996) investigated the effectiveness of mediation in a New York City school and found that suspensions decreased by 50%. Ferrara (1997) reported that a conflict resolution and peer mediation program reduced the number of suspensions. Kmmita (1996) examined the impact of the students' Creative Response to Conflict
Program during the 1993-1994 school year and found no significant differences between the experimental and control schools on overall discipline problems, although there was a non-significant trend toward reducing the most aggressive types of behaviors and the number of suspensions. In a study of a conflict resolution curriculum used in a Detroit school, Hammond and Yung (1991) reported that teachers and students perceived students as engaging in fewer violence-related school behaviors. In many of the studies, perceptions of the school climate changed for the better. In a 1995 survey of administrators in charge of discipline in California high schools, Sherrod found that the majority of respondents believed the peer conflict management programs improved the school climate (Johnson, 1996). The results of these studies provide considerable evidence that conflict resolutions and peer mediation programs do decrease discipline problems, violence, referrals, detentions, and suspensions (Johnson, 1996). The majority of literature supports the notion that peer mediation/conflict resolution programs effectively reduce violent acts in the school setting (American Bar Association, 1998).

Results indicate the worthiness for adopting peer mediation and conflict resolution programs. Research has proven these programs to be successful in reducing student discipline problems and violence in schools. Its effectiveness in reducing violent acts within the school setting will be the researchers primary goal and objective. As a result, the development of a school environment fostering learning to its fullest extent will be a tangible and visible reality.
Chapter 3

Overview and Purpose

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the impact of Peer Mediation on students. Through the use of an action research design, the intern will determine the long-range effectiveness of the Peer Mediation Program in handling student issues. The use of Peer Mediation is in place to alleviate stressful situations that students must deal with on a daily basis. It is an avenue for students to sit down and talk about problems they are having with other individuals.

The purpose of the study is to identify potentially harmful situation and through the development of the Peer Mediation Program instill both beliefs and values within the parameters of the school. As a result of developing a better understand of the Peer Mediation Program, the intern will incorporate curricular changes. These changes will result in students being taught mediation skills which will help guide their understand of respect for others.

Through the development of the Peer Mediation Program, students can alter aggression, which has the potential to become physical in nature and turn it into a learning experience. Whereby, they ultimately feel a sense of ownership and empowerment. Empowerment is a vital part of the mediation process. Students work out their problems, not as a result of an administrator making them, but by taking on the responsibility of developing agreements to which they feel confident and secure.

The significance of the project is two-fold. First, it will allow for an understanding of the effectiveness of the Peer Mediation Program. The analyzed data
will be used to better understand what students want from the Peer Mediation process and just how effective the mediation process was in meeting their needs. Second, the process empowers students to develop Peer Mediation skills including listening, understand, and perhaps, making consolations for the betterment of both individuals involved. These skills will help all individuals beyond their high school experience.

The research investigation took place during the 1999 – 2000 school year at Highland Regional High School in Blackwood, New Jersey. The researcher met the objective of his investigation by conducting a review of documents, informal interview, surveys, mediation observations, and an ongoing review of literature.

A staff development and student training program was conducted in August 1999 and again in September 1999. The Program was designed to keep both staff and students abreast of ongoing problems that existed in the school and the alternative that mediation provided to help resolve these problems. This training also provided the necessary skills and techniques needed to help diffuse possible conflict situations. Approximately twenty staff members and ten student mediators were trained in handling conflicts through techniques of mediation. Not only were there a percentage of teachers trained, the entire faculty was informed, as they have been in the past, of the mediation services and procedures for referring disgruntled students. All incoming freshmen were introduced to the services of Peer Mediation through a series of workshops conducted by the researcher and his colleague. The purpose of these workshops was to inform all freshman students of the alternatives to aggressive behavior.
Throughout the entire year, mediations were scheduled and conducted in the Peer Mediation office. Surveys were distributed to all individuals having gone through the mediation. Distribution took place approximately two weeks after the mediation. This lapse of time allows the disputants to personally reflect as well as determine whether or not they are adhering to the agreements.

Whereas disputants were given surveys regarding the effectiveness of the mediation process, mediators met monthly to discuss both positive and negative aspects of past mediations. These meetings provided informal feedback regarding many aspects of the mediation process. Areas of discussion included how disputants approached a mediation, what role the mediators played in helping disputants resolve their problems and the sincerity of the disputants in wanting to resolve the problem.

In summary, the researcher conducted staff and student in-service and training, formal and informal meetings, developed survey instrumentation, and conducted an ongoing review of literature. Through the use of action research, the researcher continually evaluated the effectiveness of the mediation program at Highland Regional High School in reducing violent acts. Action research allows for improvements and modification to take place in the mediation process as a result of feedback gathered from the above mentioned programs and documentation collected on the topic.

Context of the Study

Through an extensive review of literature, first-hand knowledge as an experienced educator, nationwide concern for school safety, community concern for the welfare of
their children and the media attention placed on school violence, the researcher focused
his attention on a method of effectively diffusing violent situations in the school setting.

Reports by the National Institute of Justice 1996 indicated the extent of violence
in the schools. In one study of inner city High Schools in four states, 80% of student
respondents reported that other students carried weapons to school, while 66% of
respondents said they personally knew someone who carried a weapon to school. In a
second study of students from nine High Schools, 39% reported being in a situation that
might have lead to a fight in the previous week. Nineteen percent reported carrying a gun
during a six month period (Periera, 1997). These reports coincide with the increase in
school violence in the past five years. Students are carrying guns to school which results
in potentially extreme outcomes in the school setting. As an educator, the researcher felt
the need to address the issue of school violence and develop alternatives to diffuse
potentially violent situations. An extensive review of literature has determined that Peer
Mediation does effectively reduce violence in the school setting. A number of studies
including ones conducted by the NEA Today (1998) and Johnson (1996) concluded that
there was a reduction in fights and verbal put-downs when Peer Mediation was put into
place.

There is a nationwide concern about school safety. The media attention to
violence has increased and the community concern regarding violence in the school
setting has brought about a need for programs, such as Peer Mediation. The Black Horse
Pike Board of Education, a group of community members, supports the need for such a
program. The mediation program at Highland Regional High School has effectively dealt with student issues that may have otherwise resulted in violent acts.

Being in the profession as an educator has allowed the researcher to develop first hand knowledge of student needs. Conflict is a natural part of life; learning positive ways to deal with it will ultimately reduce fights and verbal attacks. The researcher wants to evaluate the effectiveness of a program that has been in place for five years and institute changes that will improve the current program.

Methodology

Nature of Action Research

Action Research is a process designed to empower all participants in the educational process (students, instructors and other parties) with the means to improve the practices conducted within the educational experience (Hopkins, 1993). The model for Action Research is cyclical in nature and is intended to foster a deeper understanding of a given situation, starting with conceptualizing and particularizing the problem and moving through several interventions and evaluations (Hopkins, 1993). A representation of an Active Research model by Kemmis is provided in Table 7. Table 7 clearly displays the interactive nature of Active Research.
Table 7: Action Research (Kemmis, 1988).

The researcher has employed the steps outlined by Kemmis (1988). The planning of Peer Mediation staff development workshops, student-training sessions and freshman orientation workshops helped to improve and develop a greater understanding of the Peer Mediation Program at Highland Regional High School. Action occurs as the researcher coordinates mediations on an almost daily basis. Continual observations occur as a result of feedback from surveys and student mediator meetings. The researcher reflects upon
all resources and makes alterations and/or changes, if necessary. The process is repeated
and more changes are instituted.

Action Research incorporates the following characteristics:

- Cyclic – similar steps tend to recur, in a similar sequence;
- Participative – the clients and informants are involved as active participants in
  the research process;
- Qualitative – it deals more often with language than with numbers; and
- Reflective – critical reflection upon the process and outcomes are important
  parts of each cycle (Dick, 1997).

The nature of the researcher’s study revolves around these four characteristics of
Action Research. It is cyclic in that the Mediation Process required that the same steps
occur at each mediation. All disputants are given a survey and all mediators take part in
monthly meeting and are active participants in the research process. The study is
qualitative in nature because the researcher is observing and participating throughout the
study. Continual reflection on the part of the researcher is done after surveys are
collected and monthly mediator meeting are held.

In summary, Action Research pursues action and research outcomes. The
conclusions drawn by the researcher in his study were from multiple sources. The
conclusions emerged slowly over the course of the study, and at each point in the study
the researcher challenged the emerging conclusions by pursuing evidence collected. The
researcher employed action research in his study on the effectiveness of Peer Mediation
at Highland Regional High School.
Observations and Data Collection Techniques

Based on the investigation findings, gathered through survey instrumentation, mediation observation, informal interviews and monthly meetings, as well as information found during the review of literature, the researcher concluded that Highland Regional High School had a well designed and effective Peer Mediation program conducted by dedicated, resourceful, and conscientious mediators. However, the researcher believed that there were improvements and expansions that had to be made which would better meet the needs of the students and the school community. The researcher, who is the Peer Mediator Coordinator, has the ability to alter the current program that is in place. To determine what changes needed to be made, the researcher planned to use the data gathered during the study, student survey, to build and improve upon the current status of the Peer Mediation Program.

Understanding the usual low response to survey instruments, the researcher designed a multiple choice, four question survey, in a simplistic manner that would hopefully foster a greater response rate. The student survey was distributed to all disputants having gone through mediation. A time period of approximately two weeks elapsed before the survey was distributed so that disputants could both reflect upon and measure the effectiveness of their agreements. A second survey went out to all disputants who did not complete or did not return their original survey to the researcher. The student survey consisted of four questions that assessed disputant’s attitudes regarding the mediation process and more specifically, the effectiveness of their particular mediation (See Appendix A).
The first question asked; *how would you rate your mediation experience?* The student could choose from three responses ranging from highly successful to not successful. The purpose of this question was to get a general overview pertaining to the disputant’s feelings about the mediation process.

The second question: *Do you feel another mediation will help you better resolve your problems with the other individual?* was geared to gain feedback regarding the effectiveness of the proposed agreements for the problem that existed. Again, the disputant could choose from three responses that stated: No, the problem has been resolved; No, although there are still existing problems; and, Yes, another mediation is needed to help resolve the problem. The responses were designed to draw feedback about two areas, either a positive response to the mediation process or a negative one based upon the disputant’s answer. The researcher could determine if a follow-up mediation was necessary to effectively resolve the problem.

Question three: *Were the mediators helpful during your mediation?* centered on the ability of the mediators in helping the disputants resolve their conflict. Again, there were three responses measuring the effectiveness of the mediators. This question is relevant because it allows the researcher to determine if future training, changes or modifications need to be made in regards to the role of the student mediators.

The final question: *Based on past experience, if mediation had not been available, how would you have handled the problem?* is essential to the study in that it questions how disputants would have acted when faced with conflict. It directly attacks the integrity of the mediation program at Highland Regional High School. If all students
responded that they would ignore the problem and hoped it went away, the importance of the mediation program could be greatly questioned. Whereas, if disputants responded, I would have probably acted out physically, resulting in a fight, justifies the necessity and importance of mediation in curbing acts of aggression and violence within the school. As a result of the responses from all four questions, the researcher will be better able to modify, or enact changes in the mediation process.

The researcher organized and established collaborative sessions for the mediators by arranging times and meeting locations for planned monthly sessions. Topics at the monthly meetings reflected previous mediations and problems surrounding them. Student mediator generally discussed mediations and some problems and concerns they were having in reaching agreements. As is the rule with Peer Mediation, all names are confidential and may not be mentioned at these meetings. Feedback from the meeting as well as results from the survey instrumentation allowed the researcher to institute change where necessary.

The researcher used a variety of resources to supplement growth in the Peer Mediation Program. Staff development, student mediator training and freshman orientation workshops were methods instituted. The researcher also established monthly meeting for mediators and distributed surveys for those individuals involved in the mediation process. This assisted in expanding and improving the Mediation Program.
Outcomes

As a result of staff development workshops, student training sessions, various student mediator meetings, and the distribution and collection of survey questionnaires, the researcher hopes to formulate an environment which fosters learning to its fullest extent. This includes a decrease in conflicts within the school, decrease in violence in and around the school community, and a better understanding of the effectiveness that mediation has in handling conflict situations. Notwithstanding the fact that as the coordinator of the Peer Mediation program at Highland Regional High School, the researcher will be better able to coordinate, conduct, manage, and modify an already successful program to reduce violence in our schools.
Chapter 4

Introduction

The internship project took place from September 1999 to April 2000 at Highland Regional High School in Blackwood, New Jersey. The researcher implemented strategies for not only improving the mediation program currently in existence at Highland, but also to improve the atmosphere in the school and reduce the number of violent acts among students. The researcher began the research project in August 1999 through training sessions for both student mediators and staff members. During these sessions, students were taught mediation skills, including how to structure mediations among students, and the proper skills and techniques needed to help resolve disputes among students. Teachers were trained to properly identify potentially violent acts and taught ways to diffuse a possible conflict from occurring. In September, training sessions were conducted for all incoming freshman to make them aware of the mediation services. These sessions included defining conflict and identifying means of resolving potentially confrontational situations. Students were continually involved during the training sessions through question/answer discussions and short skits emphasizing the importance of communication in resolving conflict.

The training sessions conducted in August and September were the basis for the Peer Mediation Program. As a result of these sessions, students were properly trained to handle mediations. Teachers were trained to foresee possible conflict situations and taught the proper referral procedures for recommending mediations. Incoming freshman
were taught methods for handling conflict, as well as, communication skills needed to help them resolve conflict in a nonviolent manner.

In addition to the training sessions, the researcher conducted monthly mediator meetings. These meetings were instrumental in gathering feedback regarding the effectiveness of the mediation process, drawing conclusions regarding future mediations, and determining the process for which mediations will be conducted. These meeting also allowed the researcher to draw conclusions about the successfulness of the previously conducted mediations and permitted change in the mediation process if necessary.

Gathering feedback and implementing changes is an important component of action research.

Another component used in obtaining information was a survey instrument distributed to all students having gone through the mediation process. The primary goal of the survey was to gather feedback regarding the successfulness of each individual’s particular mediation. Approximately two weeks after the mediation, the surveys were given to the disputants. In the survey, the first question asked to rate their mediation experience from highly successful to not successful. The second question, "Do you feel another mediation will help you better resolve your problems with the other individual?" was used to determine if there was still an existing problem. Question three, "Were the mediators helpful during your mediation?" was instrumental in collecting data that could be discussed during the monthly mediator meetings. Question four, "Based on past experiences, if mediation had not been available, how would you have handled to problem?" directly questions the effectiveness of mediation in solving conflicts. The
analysis of data collected helped the researcher formulate conclusions regarding the use of mediation as a means for solving disputes. These surveys along with monthly mediator meeting were the basis for change or improvements in the structure of the mediation process.

**Research Findings**

The survey instrument sent out to all disputants was conducted so that the researcher could retain information that:

- rated the disputants’ mediation experience,
- determined if another mediation was needed to help resolve their problem,
- established if mediators were helpful during the mediations, and
- confirmed whether mediation encouraged the disputants to resolve their problems in a nonviolent manner.

From September 1999 through February 2000, forty-two mediations took place. Eighty-four disputants were involved in these mediations, each disputant was asked to complete and return a survey. Thirty-seven of the eighty-four surveys were returned. The following are the results of these surveys.

The first question asked, "*How would you rate your mediation experience?*" Nineteen students rated their experience as highly successful, fifteen rated their experience as somewhat successful, and the remaining three disputants rated their experience as not successful. (See Table 8 on page 39.) Since the majority of the responses to the survey question indicated some degree of success, the researcher
concluded that most students having gone through mediation find some degree of satisfaction from the services provided to them.

Table 8

Question two, "Do you feel another mediation will help you better resolve your problems with the other individual?" had the following results. Twenty-eight reported, "No, the problem has been resolved." Six answered, "No, although there are still existing problems," and 3 responded, "Yes, another mediation is needed to help resolve the problem." (See Table 9 below.)

Table 9

The responses from this question allowed the researcher to conclude that a majority, twenty-eight out of thirty-seven surveys, indicated that the mediation process helped
resolve their problem. Six people responded that they still had existing problems, and three responded that they needed another mediation. As a result, this question allowed the researcher to either schedule another mediation with the disputants or discuss alternative for the disputants to help resolve their problems.

Question three, "Were the mediators helpful during the mediation?" helped the researcher gather feedback and determine future training sessions for the mediators. Twenty-nine responded, "Yes, they helped me work through the problem." Seven said, "Yes, although it could have been worked out without them." One disputant responded, "No, they did not do much during the mediation process." (See Table 10 below.)

Based on the results, the researcher believes that the mediators play an integral part during mediations and a large majority responded that the mediators were helpful. This also allowed the researcher to conclude that the training sessions held in August prepared the mediators to successfully handle mediations. It also allowed the researcher to question mediators during the monthly mediator meeting regarding the role they played in the mediations that involved them.
Question four, "Based on past experiences, if mediation had not been available, how would you have handled the problem?" allowed the researcher to draw conclusions as to how individuals would have handled their conflict. Of the thirty-seven surveys collected, eight responded that they would have ignored the problem and hoped it went away. No students responded that they would have confided in a teacher or counselor about the problem. Seventeen said that they would have approached the person on their own and tried to talk out the problem. Twelve reported that they would have probably acted out physically, resulting in a fight. (See Table 11 below.)

![Bar chart showing number of responses to Question 4.]

**Table 11**

Based upon data collected, the researcher concluded that individuals deal with conflict in a variety of ways. The existence of mediation allowed students who would have ignored the problem a chance to face their conflict in a positive, nonviolent manner. A large majority, seventeen out of thirty-seven, reported that they would have tried to discuss the problem with the other individual. This large portion of responses allowed the researcher to conclude that students do possess communication skills necessary to resolve problems in a nonviolent manner.
Twelve disputants reported that they would have physically acted out, resulting in a fight, had they not been referred to mediation. This result allowed the researcher to draw direct correlations between the research proposal, The Effectiveness of Peer Mediation in Improving the Atmosphere in the School and Reducing Violent Acts in the School Setting, and the results received from the survey questionnaire. The merit of the mediation program can be justified if it were to save one fight from occurring. The results from the surveys indicate that at least twelve fights were adverted because mediation services were available.

It must be noted that some respondents indicated conflicting answers to some survey questions. For example, three students indicated that their mediation experience was not successful, but in the second question two of the three indicated that the problem had been resolved. Furthermore, all three signed agreements with the other disputant during their mediation signifying that they successfully resolved their problems. Another example of conflicting responses, two individuals responded that the mediation experience was highly successful although both reported that there were still existing problems. Many things could have caused these conflicts in answers. The most logical answers the researcher could conclude is that either the students did not properly read the survey questions, did not care what answers they choose, or are dealing with a great deal of conflict that they are not sure of the best response. This could mean that their initial problem was resolved, but additional problems arose since their mediation. Students who responded with conflicting answers were approached by the researcher regarding the confusion. Most students did indicate that they had many issues, some having been
resolved and others still not resolved. The researcher scheduled additional mediations when this occurred.

The results from the survey questions were the focus of discussion at the monthly mediator meetings. The first meeting was held on September 10th. This meeting centered on questions and/or concerns mediators had regarding a variety of issues. The main concern was their role as a mediator. Thus, some of the skills taught at the training session held in August were revisited. As the coordinator in charge of Peer Mediation, I also run the training sessions. A sampling of the summer training was given to the mediators during these meetings so that could improve their mediation skills.

The second meeting was held on October 12th. The meeting was scheduled so that the researcher could discuss the current mediation program. The researcher discussed the survey that would be distributed to the disputants and informed the mediators that changes could and probably would occur as a result of feedback drawn from the returned surveys.

The third meeting was on November 23rd. The majority of the time was spent discussing surveys that were returned. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the discussion as no names were used. A great deal of feedback was drawn from the answers, especially those concerning question three in the survey, “Were the mediators helpful during the mediation?” A few mediators did express some inability to help the disputants work through an impasse. As a result of these discussions, the researcher along with the mediators worked on ways to improve the lines of communication with the mediators and disputants. Mock sessions using mediators were held by creating
situations that mediators had to ponder. The mediators then had to help the “disputants” through their problems. The mediators found these skits highly valuable since they could watch how other mediators handled situations.

The December 15th and January 14th meetings followed a similar pattern. Survey results were presented and discussed with the mediators. Again, most of the discussion revolved around the role the mediator played during the mediation. The meeting held on February 17th was a culmination of the vast majority of the surveys. Although a final tally of the results was not available, the researcher was able to inform the mediators that most of the surveys returned were positive. The monthly mediator meetings were the stepping-stones for change within the Peer Mediation Program. Through feedback from survey questionnaires and mediator discussion, implementation and revisions to the program took place. Some of these changes will occur in future training sessions because the researcher will have a better understanding of the disputants wants and the mediators needs so that conflict can be better resolved.

Conclusions

The objective of the proposal was to improve the atmosphere of the school and reduce acts of violence in the school setting. At the conclusion of the six months of the project, the researcher observed and verified through survey results that students used mediation skills as a tool for working out their problems. Although acts of violence are inevitable in the school setting, those who used the mediation program, in most cases, resolved their conflict in a nonviolent manner. Forty-two mediations were conducted
involving eighty-four students. Only two mediations resulted in agreements not being signed. The four individuals involved in these non-signed agreements did not display any violent actions toward each other.

The researcher plans to conclude the project through the continued use of training sessions, monthly mediator meetings and follow-up questionnaires. Throughout the project, the researcher realized that students, staff and administrators were essential to the success of the Peer Mediation Program. Therefore, it is necessary to continually train mediators, staff and incoming freshman regarding the nature of the mediation program. Based on the researcher’s findings gathered through monthly mediator meeting, survey instrumentation and mediation observations, it has been concluded that the Peer Mediation Program has reduced the number of violent confrontations at Highland Regional High School. As a result, the school’s atmosphere has improved.
Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Studies

Conclusions

The review of the results was conducted in March 2000. The purpose was to identify areas within the school environment that improved as a result of Peer Mediation being in place. Furthermore, the researcher was looking to test the validity of Peer Mediation in improving the environment in the school and reducing violent acts in the school setting. The project conclusions will help assist Highland Regional High School in improving the atmosphere of the school, directing concerns of students and ultimately decreasing the acts of violence among students. As a result of this project, as well as ongoing work at improving the Peer Mediation Program, hopefully these goals will be attainable.

The researcher found the major conclusions through survey instruments collected and communication with students, faculty, and staff, that Peer Mediation does effectively reduce acts of violence in the school setting. Survey’s collected concluded that students found the mediation process as a successful means of resolving their problems. Many individuals responded that as a result of mediation, they did not resort to fighting. While others responded that mediations were an essential ingredient in helping them resolve their problems with the other individual. These conclusions draw direct parallels to improving the environment of the school. From an administrative standpoint, both the Principal and Vice Principals fully endorse the Peer Mediation program and value its effectiveness in reducing violence and bringing about harmony in the school setting.
Staff training, which was conducted prior to the opening of school, had major implications for the success of the Peer Mediation program. Teachers were properly trained in not only identifying potentially dangerous situations, but learned ways to de escalate conflicts between students. Teachers were also taught the proper procedures for requesting mediations and referring students to mediation. Through many hours of communicating with fellow colleagues, the researcher concluded that teachers, by in large, support the Peer Mediation program and saw it as an effective means for reducing violence in the school setting. Some common remarks made by teachers include, “thank you for helping make my classroom environment more conducive to teaching,” and “the staff training I have learned along with the Peer Mediation program has made the school a friendlier place to work.”

Perhaps the most informative conclusions drawn by the researcher resulted from Peer Mediation meetings. As a result of these meeting, the researcher was able to improve the effectiveness of the Peer Mediation process. It also allowed for growth and maturity of the peer mediators as they discussed ways to improve communication and ultimately help individuals work through their conflicts. The conclusions of these meeting can have long standing implications for student mediators. They not only learned ways of improving their mediation and communication skills for the present and near future, but they were continually building ways to effectively deal with conflict they may encounter in college and beyond.

The researcher has exhibited numerous dimensions of his leadership characteristics throughout the practicum. Leadership qualities were exhibited through
organization, intervention strategies, evaluation forms, and time lines that were clearly delineated for the project.

These leadership qualities include, the ability to organize faculty and student workshops on Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution, gather feedback from these workshops and use this feedback to assimilate changes where needed to the current Peer Mediation program. As staff members and students’ needs changed, the researcher demonstrated the ability to adapt to these changes and then use creativity in the development of modified plans.

The researcher used effective written and oral communication skills to inform the teachers, administration, and mediators of the ongoing developments and outcomes of the Peer Mediation program. The researcher met formally and informally with mediators in an attempt to meet their individual needs and address any areas of concern regarding their mediations. This contact has revealed the researchers leadership ability to be receptive to the needs of others.

The continuation of planned interventions and changes to the Peer Mediation program will further expand and strengthen these leadership skills of the researcher and contribute to the development of other leadership attributes. The researcher intends to focus on ongoing improvements and refinements of all leadership skills in the areas of organization, problem solving, communication, and interpersonal qualities by continuing with teacher and student training, monthly mediator meetings, and workshops designed to improve and further enhance the current mediation program.
Implications

As a result of the research conducted, literature reviewed and subsequent results drawn, the necessity of the Peer Mediation program was verified. Thus, the continuation of staff and student training, reevaluation, and necessary changes, where needed, will occur to the current program in place. With violence increasing in the school setting, the administration strongly endorses the mediation process. This is evident through the willingness to pay for teacher inservice during the summer and training of student mediators both during the summer and during the school year.

Results from the study will be reviewed by the administration to justify the effectiveness of the Peer Mediation program in reducing violence in the school setting. The results suggest the continuation of the Peer Mediation program as an integral part of the daily school atmosphere.

Further Study

The researcher will continue with staff development and student mediation training using action research. Freshman seminars on the effectiveness of mediation as a means of resolving conflict will also continue. A constant reevaluation of the current mediation program will take place through monthly mediation meetings. The researcher will accomplish these tasks by keeping an open line of communication with the administration. The researcher will also serve as a liaison between the administration and staff and the student body. Further studies, which benefit the Peer Mediation program, will be conducted as the researcher continues to acquire materials and reviews current
literature. The ongoing changes will require the researcher to be highly visible, highly interactive with the staff and student body and to observe a multitude of mediations in the many years to come.
References


Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management. (1993). Dealing with conflict in Ohio's schools. Columbus, OH.


Appendix A

Peer Mediation Survey
To:

From: Mr. Milavsky

Re: Peer Mediation

On __________ you had a mediation with _______________________________. I would appreciate it if you could answer a few questions regarding the mediation. ALL OF THE INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL.

Please check only one answer for each question

1. How would you rate your mediation experience?
   ______ Highly successful
   ______ Somewhat successful
   ______ Not successful

2. Do you feel another mediation will help you better resolve your problems with the other individual?
   ______ No, the problem has been resolved.
   ______ No, although there are still existing problems.
   ______ Yes, another mediation is needed to help resolve the problem.

3. Were the mediators helpful during your mediation?
   ______ Yes, they helped me work through my problem.
   ______ Yes, although it could have been worked out without them.
   ______ No, they did not do much during the mediation process.

4. Based on past experiences, if mediation had not been available, how would you have handled the problem?
   ______ I would have ignored the problem and hoped it went away.
   ______ I would confide in a teacher/counselor about my problem.
   ______ I would approach the person on my own and tried to talk out the problem.
   ______ I would have probably acted out physically, resulting in a fight.

Please return to Mr. Milavsky in F-106 during homeroom, place in my mailbox in the general office, or slip it under the mediation door at F-101.
Biographical Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Robert Frank Milavsky</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| High School       | Highland Regional High School  
|                   | Blackwood, New Jersey    |
| Undergraduate     | Bachelor of Science     
|                   | Physical Education       
|                   | James Madison University 
|                   | Harrisburg, Virginia     |
| Graduate          | Master of Arts          
|                   | Educational Administration 
|                   | Rowan University         
|                   | Glassboro, New Jersey    |
| Present Occupation| High School Physical Education  
|                   | and Health Teacher       
|                   | Highland Regional High School 
|                   | Blackwood, New Jersey    |