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The effects of elementary peer mediation program on disciplinary action in the schools

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THE EFFECTS OF ELEMENTARY PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM

ON DISCIPLINARY ACTION IN THE SCHOOLS

by

Elizabeth Anne Haws

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ABSTRACT
Elizabeth Anne Haws
The Effects of Elementary Peer Mediation Program
on Disciplinary Action in the Schools
1998
Dr. John Klanderman
Dr. Roberta DiHoff
School Psychology

Peer mediation programs offer students options. Students can choose mediation instead of name-calling, yelling, or letting conflicts grow until they explode into violence. Little is known about the effectiveness or manner of implementing these programs. This study examines 62 black male students in grades 4, 5, and 6 from a Burlington County, New Jersey, suburban, public K-6 elementary school. Some data suggest disciplinary action is decreased with a cadre approach to peer mediation established in the school. More attention should be paid to evaluation peer mediation and conflict resolution programs. Under peer mediation programs, students in conflict and peer mediators undergo a process of critical thinking and problem solving to find mutual satisfying solutions.

MINI-ABSTRACT

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Peer mediation is one option students can chose instead of name-calling, yelling, or letting conflict grow until they explode into violence. This study examines the cadre peer mediation approach with black males, from a Burlington County, New Jersey, suburban, public K-6 elementary school, in Grades 4, 5, and 6.

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graduate school studies. It makes a difference!

Because of the immensity of this two plus year project, I am sure I have left out the names of some very important people who have helped me along the way. You know who you are. Please know that I apologize for the oversight and that I really do appreciate all of you from the bottom of my heart for your caring and your efforts. I am truly grateful for the many hands that made this thesis possible. I love you all!

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CHAPTER 1

The Problem

Need

Bad student behavior and frequent student conflicts are prevalent in the U.S. public schools. Conflicts among students in U.S. 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 25,00 handguns enter schools daily. A quarter of all high school seniors in 1993 reported being threatened with violence (Stop the Violence, 1994).

Conflict is part of life. The way students' deal with conflict often results in disagreements that cause fights, classroom disruptions and sometimes serious violence. School-based mediation responds to conflicts that occur throughout the school. Selected students, teachers and administrators, trained in conflict resolution and mediation skills serve as mediators. Peer mediation is one option students can choose instead of name-calling, yelling or letting conflicts grow until they explode into violence.

Conflicts are a natural part of everyday life for all of us, because we have different viewpoints, attitudes, expectations and values as well as different styles of coping with conflicts. But conflict does not have to be looked at as negative. It can be a positive experience that students can learn from.

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Research suggests (NAME, 1993) that conflict resolution programs have helped to: decrease violence and fighting, reduce name-calling and put downs, decrease the number of suspensions, increase self-esteem and self-respect among peer mediators, enable teachers to deal more effectively with conflicts and improve school climate.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to test empirically the effectiveness of the cadre approach to peer mediation, in grades four, five and six. To realize this objective, the following will be examined: the number of suspensions and detentions of black males in grades 4, 5, and 6 in a suburban, middle to lower class, K-6 elementary school in Burlington County, New Jersey before (1995-96) and after (1996-97) the initiation of a peer mediation program.

Hypotheses

1. Black males, in grades 4,5 and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to resolve conflicts than black males without peer mediation training.

2. Black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to decrease the number of detentions than black males without peer mediation training.

3. Black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to decrease the number of suspensions than black males without peer mediation training.

Theory

Conflict resolution education is a relatively new field. While religious and peace activists in the 1960's and 1970's sponsored lessons in alternatives to violence, classroom teachers integrated similar lessons into the school day. In the 1980's, organizations such as the National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) pulled together educators, activists and community mediators. They envisioned a community of educators who would build conflict resolution skills among members of school communities, promote mediation as an alternative to traditional disciplinary measures, and accept conflict as an opportunity for institutional and personal growth. In 1993, NAME joined with the sponsors of the Annual Conference of Campus Mediation programs to form NAME's Committee on Higher Education and broaden the base of movement even further. Today, members work with students of all ages to deal constructively with anger, respect difference, communicate feelings, identify common ground, gain insight into the role of violence in their lives, and envision win/win solutions to complex conflicts.

The research base for peer mediation includes the theories of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Albert Bandura and Kurt Lewin. Morton Deutsch, David Johnson and Roger Johnson and others have conducted research on the effects of cooperative and competitive classroom settings.

Piaget's cognitive development theory states that children will assimilate and accommodate new experiences into ones previously learned. The added context of social interaction, especially with one's peer, enhances the cognitive development process. Children need to watch adults think through problems so they can practice those newly observed skills themselves (Seifert, 1993). Students hone these skills when they verbally and mentally work their way

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through the problem-solving process.

Vygotsky's theories on children's thinking emphasized a process in which children shared problem solving experiences with a teacher, parent, or peer. As a result, children's own language and thought intermingled and served as the vehicle for their own development (Vygotsky, 1962).

Social learning theorists, Albert Bandura and Kurt Lewin, contributed to the research base. Bandura emphasized that children are essentially actors and agents in their own learning and behavior as they model, observe and duplicate responses to a social situation (Seifert, 1993; Catron & Allen, 1993). Those who observe peer mediation confirm that an intellectual and emotional impact results when a potentially dangerous conflict is resolved and disputants "save face" and continue with their school lives.

Kurt Lewin's field theory is of special interest. Lewin warned that "one has to face the education situation with all its social and cultural implications as on concrete dynamic whole . . analysis must be a 'gestalt-theoretical' one (Maruyama, 1992). Lewin believed that the individual in a school setting is affected by personal and environmental variables that have an impact on student behavioral outcomes (Maruyama, 1992). Equally important is the way that authority figures structure the environment and reward system - what Lewin calls the "social climate" (Maruyama, 1992). Accordingly, Lewin outlines the concept of conflict as a situation in which forces acting on the individual move in opposite directions.

For several decades, Morton Deutsch (Deutsch 1949, 1973, 1991) and David and Roger Johnson (Johnson & Johnson, 1979, 1989, 1991) have emphasized that cooperative, rather than competitive relationships within the classroom create the constructive, positive environment that fosters true

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learning and conflict resolution. The Johnson believe that students can learn to respect others' view points through controversy experiences. The structured controversy approach can enhance and open students' minds to differing or opposing views (Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

One current education model has been described as a peace education curriculum. It helps children understand and learn to resolve conflicts in peaceful ways. A multi-disciplinary group of researchers (Spodek & Brown, 1993) recommends that peace education curriculum teach children skills in negotiating, conflict resolution and education for peace (Deutsch, 1991). The concept of peace education is multifaceted and cross-disciplinary, including peace and social justice, economic well-being, political participation, nonviolence, conflict resolution and concern for the environment (Stomfay-Stitz, 1993).

Definitions

cadre approach - training a small number of students to serve as peer mediators communicate - to send, receive, and understand information

confidential - to keep secret or private

conflict - disagreement or to come into opposition

disputant - a person who takes part in a dispute or conflict

emotions - strong feelings

listen - to understand, to give attention to the speaker

mediation - a method of solving conflicts using a neutral third person

mediator - a neutral third person who helps disputants resolve their conflict

neutral - a person who does not take sides

respect - to be considerate of others' rights, feelings, and beliefs

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resolve - to find a solution to a conflict

resolution - the selected solution to a conflict

win/lose - in a dispute, one person wins and the other person loses

win/win - a solution to a conflict that satisfies both people

violence - physical force exerted for the purpose of violating, damaging or

abusing

Assumptions

The cadre approach to mediation, which can be adopted relatively easily and inexpensively, is based on the assumption that a few specially trained students can defuse and constructively resolve interpersonal conflicts among students. This approach involves training a small number of students to serve as peer mediators. This type of training usually consists of either a 1- to 2-day workshop or semester-long class.

The cadre approach to mediation is based on the assumption that students are empowered to regulate their own behavior and to resolve interpersonal conflicts constructively when (a) students know peer mediation is an available alternative; (b) a student mediator can use negotiation and mediation procedures effectively; (c) peer mediators are available to support and enhance efforts to negotiate; (d) mediators and disputants maintain confidentiality in all mediations; and (e) the norms, values, and culture of the school promote and support the use of negotiation and mediation procedures

Limitations

How a peer mediator decreases the severity and frequency of interpersonal conflicts among students is not clear. Advocates theorize that the

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presence of a cadre of peer mediators makes the process of conflict resolution more democratic and less blaming, thereby reducing the sense of alienation that may result from more traditional, autocratic methods of discipline (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991). Another possibility is that peer mediation programs suppress conflict among students, because facing one's peers is more embarrassing and unpleasant than being disciplined by a teacher or an administrator (Tolson, McDonald & Moriarty, 1992).

Overview

In chapter one the focus is on the need and theory basis for the current study. In chapter two, the literature specific to black males, conflict and conflict resolution will be reviewed. In chapter three, the design of the study including; participants, independent variables, dependent variables, measures and procedure will be discussed and demonstrated. The testable hypotheses and analysis will be presented in chapter three. In chapter four, an analysis of the results will be done. The analysis will include a restatement of the hypotheses, interpretation of results, statements of significance, graphs and a summary. In the final chapter, there will be a summary, conclusion, discussion and implications for further research.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

In chapter two, a review of the current research on black males, violence prevention programs and peer mediation programs in the schools will be analyzed. Each section is followed by relevant articles in the field under study in this thesis. In section one, a description of statistics regarding black males in regard to: homicide; violent crime; incarceration; drug use; mental health problems; access to health care; and death rate will be investigated. In section two, there is an analysis of various violence prevention programs. In section three, peer mediation programs will be separated into three areas for study: high schools; middle schools; and elementary schools. In section four, there is an analysis of various approaches to resolving conflict in schools. Finally, in conclusion, a critique of the literature will be followed by the hypotheses suggested by the review and examined in this thesis.

Black Males

The statistics regarding black males in the United States are alarming. In Los Angeles County, CA , homicides between 1979 and 1994 reached epidemic proportions. According to JAMA (1995), a total of 5,541 gang related homicides occurred in the Los Angeles jurisdictions over this time. African American and Hispanics accounted for 93.3% of all victims, and 93.2% of the victims were male. The gang related homicide rate for 15-19 year old African

American males was 60.5 per 100,000 per year for the years 1979-1981, but increases to 192.41 per 100,000 per year for the years 1989-1991. This study showed that gang related homicides have become a major public health problem, particularly in the inner city. With the continually increasing numbers of gang related homicides, it is clear that law enforcement and the criminal justice system cannot solve the gang problem. To prevent gun related homicides, the United States must develop a national policy on violent street gangs that includes the commitment of public health resources. Interventions should focus on alleviating root causes of violent street gang formation (ie, poverty, stressed families, unemployment, underemployment, under education, racism, and the breakdown of sociocultural institutions). Programs to break the cycle of gang violence should also be initiated when injured gang members present themselves to the emergency department. These programs should be focused on communities with large numbers of street gangs. Gang prevention programs should be properly funded, community controlled, age specific, and culturally appropriate. For truces among violent street gangs to be effective, they should be supported by concrete efforts to alleviate the root causes of violent street gang formation.

Violent crimes are on the rise in America as studies in The New Republic (1996), reported. In 1992, black males 12 to 19 years old were 25 percent more likely to be victims of crime than whites of their age group. The murder rate among black youths (persons under age 20), which was already three times that of white youths in 1986, doubled in the five years between 1986 and 1991, while the white rate remained unchanged. In Philadelphia, Princeton political scientist, John Dilulio reports, there were eighty-nine murders of people under age 20 in 1994. All but five of the victims were nonwhite. Even more alarming,

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this situation will likely worsen considerably over the next decade as the male population aged 14 to 17 grows by about 25 percent overall and by 50 percentamong blacks. Aggravating this demographic trend is the fact that, for at last half-century, each successive generation of juvenile criminals has been more violent, and has committed more crimes than its predecessor. Each twenty-year period since 1950 has witnessed an approximate tripling in the extent of violent law breaking among juveniles engaged in crime. There is no reason to expect this progression to attenuate, given the dismal condition of so many poor children in America's cities. Violent crime is, therefore, bound to increase in inner cities (and not only there) in the short run. Necessarily, a disproportionate number of the victims claimed by this rising tide of violence will be black.

According to Glenn Loury (1996) on a given day in 1992, 372 whites and Hispanics were incarcerated for each 100,000 in the overall population, while the rate for blacks was 2,678 per 100,000. Blacks, 13 percent of the U.S., population, represented 45 percent of those arrested for violent felonies in 1992 and roughly one-half of those held in state and federal prisons. On a typical day in 1994 nearly one-third of black men aged 20-29 were either incarcerated, on parole or on bail awaiting trial. The racial disparity in prison populations has increased sharply in recent years, despite the fact (as nearly all experts agree) that blacks are not sentenced more severely than whites who have been convicted of the same crimes.

Loury argues there are individual, communal and social responsibilities involved here. Persons must be held accountable for their wrongful acts. Although they can act under a number of influences beyond their control, individuals cannot be allowed to subvert their accountability. Families and

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communities are, to some considerable degree, responsible for the behavior of their children. The task of socializing a child is a family and communal task. There is no escaping the need for social action, mediated by government and politics, in which resources are mobilized in the public sphere to help meet the needs of the indigent. We can argue about how this is to be done and what should be the extent of such provision, says Loury, but a decent society cannot tolerate with indifference the deprivation of innocents.

In his book <u>African-American Males in the Criminal Justice System</u> (1996), Jerome Miller discuss the fact that, at any given time, one in three black men in their twenties is in prison, on probation or on parole. Through exacting research, Miller provides indisputable facts to support what many black political activists have been saying for years - that young black men are targeted more by the criminal justice system than young whites and, consequently, are more likely to be destroyed before they reach adulthood.

Through Miller's good use of data, you are convinced that members of minority groups are targeted for or subject to enforcement differently than white citizens. Miller argues that such targeting is unrelated to criminal behavior. Rather, the targeting results in the establishment of a "record" for young black and Hispanics when they first hit their teenage years. They begin by having a sentence or length of time in custody longer than white peers, even at age of 12 or 13. Often they are given court appointed attorneys who do little to help them. Frequently, they are charged with minor offenses, but the establishment of this "record" takes away their hope, reduces chances of employment, and sets them on the self-fulfilling road to being a real criminal as an adult. Certainly, it is hard to agree with Miller on his data, but the questions he asks are important and are worthy of attention.

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In research by Harvey & Rauch (1997), many adolescents engage in risky behaviors that may be harmful, even fatal, consequences for themselves and others. The leading causes of adolescent injury and death - motor vehicle crashes, homicide, and suicide - are behavior problems related to risky behaviors. These behaviors are particularly acute among African American males adolescents who live in high-risk environments. The number of black men age 13 and older who died from AIDS transmitted through intravenous drug use jumped from 674 in 1985 to 2,050 in 1993, greater than the increase of 223 to 787 for their white counterparts. Between 1980 and 1992, the suicide rate among young black males increased 300 percent, more than twice the increase among all teenagers. Even though African American youths in general use alcohol and drugs less than white youths, substance abuse is epidemic in poor black neighborhoods. Black youths are more likely than white youths to use cocaine and to use emergency rooms for drug related reasons. Gonorrhea and syphilis are more prevalent among black teenagers then among white or Hispanic teenagers.

Black male teenagers are also at risk for mental health problems. In 1989 the Institute of Medicine estimated the rate of mental disorder was 12 percent for all children under the age of 18 but in excess of 20 percent for those living in urban ghettos. A study of children living in violent communities suggested that children are psychologically harmed by erosion of the sense of personal safety and security, generalized emotional distress, depersonalization, and a diminished future orientation. Unfortunately, current data regarding the prevalence of depression and other mental problems among African American youths are unavailable.

Access to and use of health services is problematic for black male

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adolescents. The barriers to health care are many. Removal of some, such as lack of health insurance, is contingent on the political arena. Other barriers to health care are rooted in the behaviors of health practitioners and organizations. They include conduct that manifests - or is perceived as manifesting - racism, classism, and cultural insensitivity. These barriers are responsive to change through interventions targeted at the organizational and individual levels. Because their generalist skills and sensitivity to issues of diversity, Harvey & Rauch state social workers are equipped to initiate and lead efforts to reduce racist, classiest,a d ethnocentric barriers to health care.

In the research of Harvey & Rauch it explains the escalating death rates of African Americans has been labeled "maafa", a term that refers to genocide. It is similar in meaning to the Jewish Holocaust. Addressing this national health crisis will require national commitment; comprehensive interventions targeted at individuals, families, communities, and institutions; and cooperation among all levels of government and private organizations. When the nation will have the will to expend the resources needed to stop maafa is uncertain. Until that time the authors suggest youth have the opportunity to survive through reconnection to their heritage and nourishment of their personal resources.

Violence Prevention

In articles by Marilyn Sherman (1997), Meyer & Northup (1997), Denny Wolf (1995) and Johnson & Johnson (1996), many schools have effective safe-school plans. And a key to many successful schools' plans is peer mediation or mediation by outside volunteers. Working with trained mediators, both sides in a dispute hear each other's problems and work toward a solution that both can accept. Students, parents, and school and community officials must work as a

team to combat the growing problem of violence in the schools. Schools around the country are working to be safe havens for students. Safe schools put the squeeze on guns, drugs, and gangs - and squeeze out violence. Schools count on students to come through a conflict with a cool head.

Meyer and Northup state people have asked them, "What difference are you making in a society filled with violence?". Their response is that they try to model a positive approach to conflict. First, asking the children to sit in a circle helps to establish equality and a willing suspension of power. By facilitating discussions, they model a sharing of power, because they have found that young people often feel powerless, and many of the adults they encounter use power in inappropriate ways. Second, they train their facilitators in active listening and problem-solving skills. They have discovered that many young people do not believe they have any choices where violence is concerned. Third, They believe young people must develop trust in others before they will share their experiences and truly rehearse nonviolent responses to conflict. Lighthearted games, that give a chance to be silly, help break down the "street smart" reserve that these young people have developed. Finally, they have designed activities with real life experiences in mind. Young people learn more from their own engagement with the activities than they do from information shared with them verbally.

Meyer & Rauch believe continuous critical assessment helps to answer the question of program success. Through assessment they found their original program was effective for boys but not for girls. In response, they designed a more experimental curriculum that incorporated issues of interpersonal conflict and developmental concerns of both boys and girls. They found that their previous program tended to focus on boys' issues and they wanted to include

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the female voice.

Preliminary outcomes from a 1995-96 evaluation of RIPP (Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways) showed several promising, statistically significant differences between students who participated in RIPP and those who did not. The positive outcomes include both boys and girls. RIPP participants reported significantly fewer violence related injuries that required medical treatment; they reported more positive changes in self-esteem; and they reported using resources such as peer mediation at a higher rate than did nonparticipants.

Students who did not participate in RIPP showed significantly greater increases in their incidence of bringing weapons to school, disruptive behavior, defiance of school personnel's authority, and other disciplinary code violations. The suspension rate for the last quarter showed dramatic differences: 16 percent for nonparticipants verses 7 percent for RIPP participants.

Authors noted that the U.S. homicide rate continues to greatly exceed that of similar countries across the globe. The 1984 U.S. homicide rate (7.9 per 100,000 - the lowest rate in the past 20 years) was seven times that of Japan, four times that of Australia and Canada, and practically twice that of any European nation (Ireland's was lass than 1.0 per 100,000; Spain's, 4.3 per 100,000). Therefore, although U.S. violence rates seem to be decreasing, they find no room for complacency when it comes to violence prevention in the schools.

Peer Mediation

According to Gary Heller (1996), Monroe-Woodbury Senior High School in New York has succeeded in decreasing drug related problems and violence by 29-40% through the introduction of successful intervention strategies. These

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strategies include: Anger Management Seminars; Human Understanding and Growth Programs; peer mediation; and student counseling services. Schools should identify clear, concise and relevant curricular goals that are student oriented in order to maintain discipline. The strategies adopted should be sensitive toward the students' socioeconomic and racial concerns.

Stomfay-Stitz (1996), Dudley, Johnson & Johnson (1996) and Lewin (1997) have all reported the successes of peer mediation in the middle school setting. These successes included: increasing their use of integrative negotiations; positiveness of students' attitudes toward conflict; decreased racial tension; decreased violence; and students learning to view each other with respect and tolerance.

Johnson & Johnson examined the impact of conflict resolution training on students' use of distributive and integrative negotiating procedures. In a Midwestern, suburban middle school, 176 students (grades 6-9) participated in the study. Students were placed in a negotiation situation involving the buying and selling of commodities in which they could adopt a distributive (maximizing own outcomes) or an integrative (maximizing joint outcomes) negotiation approach. There was no significant difference between males and females or among students in the 6th, 7th, 8th or 9th grades. The results in this study indicate that conflict-resolution and peer-mediation training resulted in the middle school students increasing their use of integrative negotiations and the positiveness of students' attitudes toward conflict.

Johnson & Johnson (1995) examined the effectiveness of a peer mediation program in a Midwestern, suburban school in the U.S. Six classes (containing grades 2-5) containing 144 students received 9 hours of training in negotiating integrative agreements to their conflicts and mediating their

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classmates' conflicts. 83 untrained third, fourth and fifth grades served as a control group. A peer mediation program was implemented. The role of mediator was rotated equally among all class members. A pretest/post test, experimental/control group design was used.

The researchers primary purpose was to ascertain whether the students had mastered the negotiation and mediation procedures. On a written test, 94% of the students accurately recalled 100% of the steps for negotiation and the procedures for mediation, and the remaining 6% of the students forgot only one step. 92% of the students accurately recalled 100% of the mediation procedures, and the remaining 8% of the students recalled the procedures almost perfectly. When the conflict scenario measure was administered at the end of the school year, 92% of the students were able to write out all the negotiation and mediation steps, and the remaining 8% of the students forgot only one of the steps. Considering that several students had learning disabilities, these results indicate that the training was effective.

The final dependent variable was the teachers' and principal's reactions to the peer mediation training and program. When interviewed, the six participating teachers and the school principal endorsed the program. The teachers reported that the training reduced the severity and destructiveness of students' conflicts, resulting in a more positive classroom climate. The teachers stated that because the students managed their own conflicts constructively, the teachers and the principal spent a great deal less time resolving students' conflicts. All five of the adults who were interviewed said that, without qualification, they would participate in future peer mediation training.

These results empirically confirm anecdotal evidence about the effectiveness of peer mediation in schools and validate the assumptions

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underlying the total student body approach to peer mediation. Few schools have made a commitment to teach students the procedures they need to manage conflicts constructively, and without direct training, many students may never learn to do so.

Resolving Conflict

Research by Johnson & Johnson (1994) indicates all children, adolescents, and young adults need to learn how to manage conflicts constructively. They believe there are three steps in doing so. The first is establishing a cooperative context, primarily through the use of cooperative learning. The second is to create intellectual conflicts through the use of structured academic controversies. Controversy results in increased student achievement, critical thinking, higher level reasoning, intrinsic motivation to learn, and a number of other important equational outcomes. The third is to establish a peer mediation program in which students try to negotiate integrative agreements to their conflicts of interest and, if negotiations fail, seek the help of a peer mediator. All students should be taught how to negotiate and how to mediate and the role of the mediator should be rotated throughout the classroom and school so that all students gain mediating experience.

There have been a number of evaluations of and studies on peer mediation programs in schools. The studies focused on peer mediation programs in elementary, middle, high school, and college settings. The programs were evaluated over a period of several months to two years. The schools were in large urban to small suburban, and small rural school districts. Students varied from lower to upper middle class and were from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Mediators were drawn from a wide variety of ethnic

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backgrounds. The findings indicate about 85-95 percent of the conflicts mediated by peer resulted in lasting and stable agreements. Students trained in mediation engaged in less antisocial and more prosocial behavior in schools. Violence and other serious discipline problems decreased. Referrals to the principal were reduced by about 60%. Generally, the most frequent conflicts were gossip\rumor, harassment, arguments, threats of physical violence, and classroom behavior. Most of these studies, however, are of very poor quality methodologically. Their results, therefore, have to be interpreted with caution.

Stomfay-Stitz has noted the benefits of peer mediation. Strategies to prevent conflicts and identify situations that could provoke violence often include students, parents and school personnel - truly the entire school community. New York City's project SMART teaches alternatives to violence, focusing on student/teacher conflicts. The program resulted in fewer incidents of vandalism and calls to police.

Peer mediation may also include intervention strategies for situations with the potential for conflict, such as play behavior and playground disputes. Researchers criticized school staffs' lack of concern in fully addressing bullying as a widespread problem. An older study revealed that victimization by bullies reaches its highest level during the middle school years. In a videotape describing the Conflict Manager Program, a former bully describes how, as a peer mediator, he slowly came to understand his victims' viewpoints and how his behavior harmed the weaker and smaller students. Bullying should receive wider attention in school peer mediation programs.

Students, faculty and administrators who participated in a detailed program at Gree Elementary School in Charlottesville, Virginia, reported positive results. Teachers reported the "pressure on teachers to serve as

disciplinarians" decreased as a result of the program. The 5th grade students themselves reported using "creative solutions when given the opportunity." They came to show greater respect for each other as they grew more adept at using their communication and problem-solving skills. The researcher recommended that peer mediation and conflict resolution skills be infused or "embedded in the entire curriculum and philosophy of a school." In cases where "the decision-making in the class is teacher-dictated, the program would be ineffective."

In another study at a rural elementary school in West Virginia, the school counselor taught conflict resolution and peer mediation skills to 80 5th graders. Results showed a decrease in behavior problems in the classroom, on the playground and in referrals to the principal's office.

Schools continue to report their success with conflict resolution and individual peer mediation programs. While many results are based on anecdotal evidence, several are based on data collected from students, faculty and administrators. A pilot program in Minnesota that was based on the Peacemaker Program reported that the "frequency of student-student conflicts . . . dropped 80 percent" while conflicts referred to the principal were reduced to zero. A Wisconsin middle school reported that 189 successful student disputes were mediated during the first six months of its program.

One researcher described the "ripple effect" from the programs. Parents and students indicated that they were resolving their home conflicts "in new and more productive ways" and with noticeable benefits to sibling relationships. Peer relationships are powerful ones, based on social interactions that can help others to learn, share and help each other. Each year of development makes the process more complex and inclusive. Peer relationships will eventually

supplant the influence of family for children. Thus, autonomy, achievement and social skills are all influenced by peer relationships.

Several national organizations are helping to disseminate instructional training materials, and also are serving as clearinghouses and networks for those interested in conflict resolution and peer mediation. Educator for Social Responsibility (ESR) reported greater demand for training in their Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). Education organizations have also joined the effort. Phi Delta Kappa and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development have planned professional development institutes. The National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME), the Consortium for Peace, Research, Education and Development (COPRED), the National Institute for Dispute Resolution (NIDR) and the Children's Creative Response to Conflict (CCRC) all work to enhance knowledge and research on conflict resolution and peer mediation.

In recent years, entire school systems have adopted detailed plans for conflict resolution and peer mediation. The school system in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has included the Conflict Manager Program in all school and summer neighborhood community centers. Ohio deserves attention as a leader in the creation of community and school-based projects under a model known as the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict management (OCDRCM). A three-year data collection and evaluation project is currently underway to assess the effect of pilot programs in mediation and conflict resolution in 17 schools throughout the state. In New Mexico, a state-wide model included over 60 schools (K-12), in addition to juvenile justice, family and victim offender mediation programs.

Peer mediation programs in the schools offer alternatives to violence.

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Instead of physical fights, threats and verbal abuse, students are taught specific communications and conflict resolution skills. These skills lead students and their peer mediators through a process of critical thinking and problem-solving in order to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution.

Current data on peer mediation programs in the schools are significant for several reasons. First, the effectiveness of total student body approach was examined; second, elementary school students were trained to use negotiation and mediation procedures; and third, most of the studies that have been conducted, until recently, have lacked methodological quality.

Relatively no data exists regarding the effect of peer mediation on black males to resolve conflicts in the schools. This thesis hypothesizes that: black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to resolve conflicts than black males without peer mediation training; black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to decrease the number of detentions than black males without peer mediation training; and black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to decrease the number of suspensions than black males without peer mediation training. Based on current research findings, statistically relevant studies are essential in the rapidly growing field of peer mediation in the schools.

CHAPTER 3

Method

Participants

Sixty-two students in a central New Jersey, suburban, public K-6 elementary school in the United States participated in the study. All of the students were from middle to lower class households with a median household income of $47,121. According to The New Jersey Municipal Data Book (1997), the racial breakdown of the community is 40% white, 56% black and 4% other with a population of approximately 36,291. Eight of eight teachers, in grades four, five and six, volunteered to participate in the program. Nine teachers (2-second grade, 1- third grade, 1- fourth grade, 1- fifth grade, 2 - self contained special education teachers, 2- special education resource center teachers) volunteered to establish the new program in the school. Students' academic achievement was heteogenous; each class included a number of students who were gifted, learning-disabled, or needed special education.

Independent Variable

The research design was a pre-post procedure in which the black males were measured before and after training. The number of detentions and suspensions before training were measured and the number of detentions and suspensions after training were measured. Peer Mediation training was conducted over a three day period (twelve hours) with18 students selected by

their peers in grades 4, 5 and 6 to serve as student mediators. Conflict resolution training in the classroom, for all students in grades 4, 5 and 6, was taught by teachers with monthly lesson plans.

Dependent Variables

Two dependent variables were included. The first was the frequency of detentions and suspensions of black males during the 1995-96 school year in grades 4, 5 and 6 with no peer mediation program. The second was the frequency of detentions and suspensions of black males during the 1996-97 school year in grades 4, 5 and 6 with a peer mediation program in place. The information was gathered through a weekly principal's disciplinary report to the Chief of Security with date of conflicts, students names, grades, gender, ethnicity, violation code by disciplinary policy and type of discipline (suspension/detention).

Procedure

The two-year study was conducted during the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years. A group of teachers volunteered to participated in the program after it was explained at the end of the 1994-95 school year. The 1995-96 school year was used to research information, gather materials and come up with a workable school plan for peace. Peer mediation was introduced to the students during the 1996-97 school year. Peer mediators were selected by their classmates for training in June 1996 and were trained in September 1996. Training lasted for three days and a total of 12 hours.

Curriculum and procedures that were used to train the students were the same for all grade levels. The curriculum used was drawn from Mediation For

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KIDS: Kids In Dispute Settlement (Peace Education Foundation, 1992). Each peer mediator was provided with a copy of a student handbook (Peace Education Foundation, 1992), which included activities and lesson plans for each training session.

Students were divided into groups of 3 and 4 to learn skills, procedures/vocabulary of peer mediation, role play, group discussions and drill/review exercises. The training was conducted by three teachers with experience in conflict resolution training, a master's candidate student in School Psychology who was a certified special education teacher, a certified second grade teacher and a certified self-contained special education teacher.

The training consisted of three parts (Peace Education Foundation, 1992): (a) introduction and understanding conflict (What is a conflict?); (b) listening, paraphrasing, probing (effective mediators listen carefully to disputants' words and watch their body language for underlying feelings); and (c) the mediation process (students' take on the role of mediator and disputant so they will understand what it is like to be in someone else's shoes). During the final part mediators practice the procedures for mediating conflict, rules for fighting fair and making a formal agreement.

Once the program was implemented and the training complete, students in grades 4, 5 and 6 were able to request mediations. A student or staff member filled out a "request for mediation" form and sent it to the program coordinator. The coordinator, by grade of the disputants, assigned two mediators to the conflict. The role of mediator was rotated among trained peer mediators. The peer mediators wore special friendship bracelets, patrolled the cafeteria and playground and were available during lunch periods to mediate conflicts.

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Hypotheses

   1. Black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to resolve conflicts than black males without peer mediation training.

   2. Black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to decrease the number of detentions than black males without peer mediation training.

   3. Black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to decrease the number of suspensions than black males without peer mediaiton training.

Analysis

   For the purpose of this study, each grade of students per school year were combined for analysis. There were no significant difference on the dependent variables, either between classes or black males.   T-tests were used to determine the significance of the differences between the pre- and post-training of students with detentions and suspensions. The results of the study will also reported as percentages.

Results

   The primary purpose of this study was to ascertain whether black males in grades 4, 5, and 6 with peer mediation training were more likely to resolve conflicts. Therefore, lessening the number of detentions and suspensions by this group.

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CHAPTER 4

Analysis of Data

Restatement of Hypothesis

1. Black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to resolve conflicts than black males without peer mediation training.

2. Black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to decrease the number of detentions than black males without peer mediation training.

3. Black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with peer mediation training are more likely to decrease the number of suspensions than black males without peer mediation training.

Interpretation of Results

For the purpose of this study, six paired sample t-tests were used. Two paired sample t-testes were used per grade level, one for detentions pre- and post-training and one for suspensions pre- and post-training. A t-test was used to determine the significance of the differences between pre- and post-training of black males in grades 4, 5, and 6.

The independent variables for this study were the students in grades 4, 5, and 6. The dependent variables for this study were (1)the frequency of detentions and suspensions of black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with no peer

mediation program and (2) the frequency of detentions and suspensions of black males, in grades 4, 5, and 6, with a peer mediation program in place.

Statements of Significance

As represented in the statistics of this study, there was no significant difference between the pre- and post-training of students in grades 4, 5, and 6 with detentions. There was also no significant difference between the pre- and post-training of students in grades 4, 5, and 6 with suspensions. These results are seen in the data as shown below with a probability level of .05.

Table 4.

Detentions and Suspensions of Grades 4, 5, and 6 for the schools years
1995-96 and 1996-97

	detentions (variables 1-3)		suspensions (variables 2-4)	
	t	sig.	t	sig.
Grade (3) 4 df=15	.183	.857	-.940	.362
Grade (4) 5 df=16	-.523	.608	-1.14	.269
Grade (5) 6 df=28	2.596	.015	2.572	.013

The primary importance was to ascertain whether students had lessened the number of detentions and suspensions once a peer mediation program was established. The number of detentions and suspensions were analyzed as percentages per grade level. In grade 4, the number of students receiving detentions decreased 12 1/2% and there was no change in the number of students receiving suspensions. In grade 5, the number of students receiving detentions decreased 11% and the number of students receiving suspensions decreased 6%. In grade 6, the number of students receiving detentions increased 14% and the number of students receiving suspensions increased 17%. In the study, the number of students with no detentions or suspensions increased 13% in grade 4, increased 7% in grade 5 and decreased 20% in grade 6. These results indicate educational based significance for grades 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

The present data on peer mediation is important for several reasons. First, the effectiveness of a cadre approach to mediation was examined through disciplinary action (detentions and suspensions); second, elementary school children were trained to use negotiation and mediation procedures; and third, most of the studies conducted previously lack the methodological quality of the present study. Currently, relatively no data exists on the effects of peer mediation on the black student population in the schools.

The present results empirically confirm anecdotal evidence about the effectiveness of peer mediation in the schools and validate assumptions underlying the cadre approach to peer mediation. These results indicate educational based significance for elementary schools. In grades 4 and 5 a reduction of detentions and suspensions was between 6-12 1/2% and the amount of students without disciplinary probelms increased as much as 13%. The training program was based on several theories, therefore linking training for elementary school students and the literature on conflict resolution. Few schools have made the commitment to teach students the procedures they need to manage conflicts constructively, and without direct training, many students never learn to do so.

Conclusions

Few studies have been conducted on the cadre approach to peer mediation. Additional research is necessary involving number of classes, grade levels and validating that young children can be taught to negotiate agreements to conflicts with their classmates. Peer mediation programs in the schools offer alternative to violence. Instead of physical fights, threats and verbal abuse, students are taught specific conflict resolution skills. These skills lead students and their peer mediators through a process of critical thinking and problem-solving in order to arrive at a mutually beneficial solution.

Presently, limited documentation exists on the implementation and success of these programs. In the study, relatively no significance was found in grade 6. Further study is needed exploring theory on early adolescent behavior. Present peer mediaiton programs may need adaptions to encompass the needs of early adolescents Recent reviews of school-based programs and youth violence prevention effort in general emphasize the importance for more research and evaluation of existing future programs. The limited amount of evidence of success has caused some to question the value of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs.

Recommendations for Future Research

Evaluation of any program should assess violence reduction or, at least, acquisition of knowledge and skills. Several evaluation plans are possible. A randomized experimental design is the most powerful evaluation approach. Randomized experimental designs, however, are not always feasible, especially for projects encompassing multiple strategies such as peer mediation/conflict resolution, parent training and mentoring. Simpler

approaches, as this study demonstrates, can be taken. For example, program schools and be compared with non project schools. These comparisons may involve knowledge or skills acquisition measured by "pencil and paper" tests, or comparison of various behavioral data, much of which is collected regularly in schools.

The following recommendations are:

1. Evaluations of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are needed. These programs are being widely implemented at unknown cost and with unconfirmed benefit.

2. Given limited evidence of success, colossal number of curricula, and wide range of implementation efforts, school officials should assess of any program adopted by their school. Assessment should not be expensive or exhaustive, but it should be done.

3. Evaluations should describe the target group; the comparison group, if any; content of the curriculum; program implementation including the role of a consultant, if any; amount and type of teacher training; quantitative changes, if any, in violence-related knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors of the students, both short term and longer-term; characteristics of the community in which the project takes place; and other associated efforts such as involvement of parents or mentors. Assistance with an evaluation may be available from local or state health departments, or local colleges or universities.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix A
Data for Grade (3) 4

Variable 1 - detentions with no program
Variable 2 - suspensions with no program
Variable 3 - detentions with program
Variable 4 - suspensions with program

	var00001	var00002	var00003	var00004
1	1.00	2.00	9.00	.00
2	1.00	.00	.00	.00
3	1.00	1.00	2.00	4.00
4	.00	.00	.00	.00
5	8.00	1.00	5.00	6.00
6	7.00	1.00	9.00	2.00
7	1.00	.00	2.00	.00
8	5.00	.00	.00	.00
9	6.00	4.00	4.00	1.00
10	.00	.00	.00	.00
11	4.00	.00	3.00	1.00
12	.00	.00	.00	.00
13	4.00	1.00	3.00	.00
14	.00	.00	.00	.00
15	1.00	.00	1.00	1.00
16	2.00	4.00	1.00	6.00

Appendix B
Data for Grade (4) 5

Variable 1 - detentions with no program
Variable 2 - suspensions with no program
Variable 3 - detentions with program
Variable 4 - suspensions with program

	var00001	var00002	var00003	var00004
1	3.00	.00	3.00	1.00
2	5.00	.00	3.00	2.00
3	1.00	1.00	.00	.00
4	1.00	.00	.00	.00
5	.00	.00	.00	.00
6	.00	.00	2.00	.00
7	.00	.00	.00	.00
8	.00	.00	.00	.00
9	.00	1.00	.00	.00
10	.00	.00	.00	.00
11	.00	.00	.00	.00
12	.00	.00	.00	.00
13	.00	.00	.00	.00
14	.00	.00	1.00	.00
15	.00	.00	.00	.00
16	.00	.00	.00	2.00
17	2.00	.00	.00	.00

Appendix C
Data for Grade (5)

Variable 1 - detentions with no program
Variable 2 - suspensions with no program
Variable 3 - detentions with program
Variable 4 - suspensions with program

	var00001	var00003	var00004	var00005
1	.00	.00	.00	.00
2	3.00	1.00	3.00	1.00
3	.00	.00	6.00	2.00
4	.00	.00	.00	.00
5	.00	.00	5.00	.00
6	2.00	.00	3.00	6.00
7	.00	.00	.00	.00
8	5.00	.00	9.00	.00
9	.00	.00	.00	2.00
10	9.00	2.00	11.00	.00
11	.00	.00	.00	.00
12	1.00	1.00	1.00	.00
13	.00	.00	2.00	.00
14	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
15	.00	.00	.00	.00
16	.00	.00	.00	.00
17	.00	.00	3.00	1.00
18	.00	.00	3.00	4.00
19	.00	.00	.00	.00
20	1.00	.00	7.00	5.00
21	1.00	1.00	7.00	1.00
22	3.00	2.00	4.00	5.00
23	1.00	1.00	2.00	.00
24	2.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
25	7.00	2.00	6.00	2.00
26	4.00	6.00	3.00	3.00
27	.00	.00	.00	.00
28	3.00	1.00	3.00	2.00
29	8.00	.00	17.00	13.00

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