The effectiveness of peer mediation on student behavior at the Paul W. Carleton School

Charles A. Warfield
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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PEER MEDIATION
ON STUDENT BEHAVIOR AT THE
PAUL W. CARLETON SCHOOL

by
Charles A. Warfield

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in The Graduate School of
Rowan University
April 18, 2000

Approved by
Professor

Date Approved May 2001
Abstract

Charles A. Warfield

The Effectiveness of Peer Mediation on Student Behavior at the Paul W. Carleton School 2000
Dr. Ronald L. Capasso
Educational Administration

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of the newly developed and implemented Peer Mediation Program in an elementary school. Peer mediation is the use of third party students who are trained in the mediation process to help other students resolve interpersonal conflicts prior to their escalation to physical or verbal offenses. Students may be referred to the Peer Mediation Program by teachers or the administrator. They may also request a mediation session on their own. Disputing students who participated in the Peer Mediation Program worked cooperatively to reach an agreement with the aid of the peer mediators. These agreements were then written in the form of student contracts and signed by the disputants. The study found that as a result of the program, referrals to the office for fighting or threats decreased during the time that the program was operational. Additionally, at the conclusion of the study all student contracts remained intact.
Charles A. Warfield

The Effectiveness of Peer Mediation on Student Behavior at the Paul W. Carleton School 2000
Dr. Ronald L. Capasso
Educational Administration

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the newly developed and implemented Peer Mediation Program in helping elementary students resolve their interpersonal conflict peacefully through mediation. The study found that the program was successful in decreasing the number of students referred to the office for physical and verbal offenses against one another.
Acknowledgments

The intern would like to express his appreciation to the Penns Grove - Carneys Point Regional School District for allowing him to complete this study, in partial fulfillment of his internship through Rowan University. The intern was provided with total professionalism throughout the process and is appreciative of the cooperation shown to him by members of the district.

The intern would like to thank the members of the Paul W. Carleton School. The dedication of the participating faculty members made Peer Mediation in our school successful. The principal, Ms. Emma J. Shockley, has provided him with patience, support, and cooperation through each step of this study. In addition, the intern would be remiss were he not to acknowledge secretaries Mrs. Lori Necelis and Mrs. Gerri Jones. These ladies took the intern under their wings and showed him the way around the office of the school. They truly added to his experience as an intern and made this time educational as well as enjoyable.

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Finally, the intern would like to thank his son Casey. You are the underlying motivation behind his efforts and you have given him every reason to try making this world a better place.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

Students come to our schools today with considerable knowledge in many areas. Often, they are computer literate with a savvy for surfing the web. They can name the statistics of their favorite football stars or the hobbies of their favorite singer. Many times they are able to cook, clean the house, change diapers, and shop at the grocery store at an age when many of their teachers were just becoming aware of their surroundings.

However, what these children possess in worldliness, they sometimes lack in interpersonal relation skills. More times than not, these responsible children may be quick to fight, become verbally abusive toward other students, or unable to cope with viewpoints other than their own. As a result, schools today are becoming places for expressing violence more than ever before.

To help quell aggressive behavior exhibited by students, schools across the country are including conflict resolution lessons as integral parts of their school programs. Interpersonal relationship skills that were once taught at home are now finding their way into school curricula across the country. School children today are as likely to be taught how to handle differences of opinion as they are instructed how to compute differences between fractions.
Peer mediation programs have made their way into school programs as well. These programs are designed to teach conflict resolution skills to students while giving them a forum in which they can practice these skills. They often start in elementary schools and continue through the high school level. Using students as third party neutral mediators and trained teachers as facilitators, has been successful in helping other students peacefully solve their disagreements. As a result of these programs involving peer mediation, student violence rates have been shown to decrease at all levels of education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a peer mediation program at the elementary level involving fourth and fifth grade students using a school-based action research design. The study will result in a report to the parents, teachers, and administration detailing the effectiveness of the program. Peer mediation means using students and facilitators trained in the mediation process to help other students resolve interpersonal conflicts.

The intended change for the organization is for the students to use peer mediation to resolve their interpersonal conflicts peacefully rather than resorting to violent or aggressive actions requiring administrative intervention. This will ultimately result in an improvement in the overall school climate. Peer mediation is the use of students and facilitators trained in the mediation process to help other students achieve a peaceful resolution to their interpersonal problems.
The development of a peer mediation program for the fourth and fifth grade students attending the Paul W. Carleton School should help allay potentially violent situations between students before they erupt. Most all fourth and fifth grade students are developmentally mature enough to recognize appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in school. They are also able to identify methods for the successful resolution of confrontations before they become violent. Consequently, such a program should benefit the students of the school by helping them seek and foster peaceful resolutions to their problems.

Definitions

1. *Agreement* - a document constructed by the peer mediator which is mutually developed, approved, and signed by the disputants. The disputants are expected to adhere to the terms of the agreement.

2. *Confidentiality* - the idea that the issues being discussed during a peer mediation session will not be discussed afterward. However, this does not include discussions about drugs, weapons, child abuse or any potentially significant danger to disputants or others.

3. *Coordinator* - the person who constructs the schedule and ensures the successful implementation of the program.

4. *Facilitator* - a faculty member who presides over the peer mediation session. Facilitators are expected not to participate directly in the mediation process and are present to ensure the success and safety of the mediation process.
5. **Disputants** - two or more students who are involved in a conflict that they feel cannot be resolved successfully without the assistance of a peer mediator.

6. **Mediation Request** - a form completed by students involved in conflict who wish to have a peer mediation session.

7. **Mediation Room** - a private room where peer mediation sessions occur.

8. **Peer Mediator** - a member of the student body who has been trained to act as a peer mediator.

9. **Peer Mediation Session** - a process whereby students involved in a conflict meet with two neutral students in order to resolve the dispute peacefully.

10. **Training** - a two-day workshop attended by students and teachers who are involved in the peer mediation program to learn how to successfully conduct a peer mediation session.

**Limitations of the Study**

The study will be conducted in the Paul W. Carleton School and will include the entire fourth and fifth grade student population of the school. Only physical and verbal offenses against other students reported to the administrator for the 1998-1999 and the 1999-2000 school years will be included in this study.

The findings of this study are limited only to generalizations about the Paul W. Carleton School. No further inferences will be gained about the success of a peer mediation program at either the high school or middle school levels, or at elementary levels lower than fourth grade. The study will ultimately be deemed successful if the
number of physical and verbal offenses against other students has decreased from the previous year. Qualitative analysis of the data collected will yield insight into the project’s success. Because the morale of the staff very often affects the environment of the school, additional achievement will be measured by the perception of the staff as to the effectiveness of the peer mediation program.

This study is bound by the constraints of the building in which it takes place. The entire school will be the focal point of the study. The intern has included the entire school, rather than simply using a sample, because with just over 300 students in the school it should be small enough to be observed.

In addition to the previously mentioned delimitations, the success of this study rests on the cooperation and dedication of the teachers, students, and parents involved in the peer mediation program. The study has total support from the administration of the building and the school’s district office. However, those who actually conduct the training and the individual sessions will play an integral role in the program’s success.

Setting of the Study

The Penns Grove - Carneys Point Regional School District, located in Salem County, is comprised of the communities of Penns Grove and Carneys Point. Penns Grove consists of approximately one square mile along the Delaware River. Surrounding Penns Grove, Carneys Point measures eighteen miles. These communities are located in the northwestern part of Salem County near the juncture of US Route 130, Interstate 295, Exit 1 of the New Jersey Turnpike, and the Delaware Memorial Bridge.
The borough of Penns Grove is primarily residential. Housing consists mostly of single family dwellings. There are four apartment complexes as well: Penns Grove Gardens, Penn Village, Silver Run and Mallard Park. These complexes are considered to be low-income housing projects. Within Penns Grove, there is also one senior citizen building and one nursing home for those members of the community that are in need of their services (LaBastelle, 1985, p. 11).

The township of Carneys Point includes both residential and agricultural areas. Housing there is comprised mainly of single family dwellings. Moor’s Landing, Sandy Ridge, and River’s Bend make up the apartment complexes in the community. Carneys Point also has one senior citizen building for the elder members of the community as well as one nursing home (LaBastelle, 1985, p.32).

Politically, the communities of Penns Grove and Carneys Point maintain separate municipal governments. The borough of Penns Grove is governed by six council members elected to three-year terms and a mayor who is elected to a four-year term. Carneys Point is governed by five committee members elected to three-year terms. The mayor is selected form among the committee’s five members and serves a one-year term. Though they function separately, they share one post office, the same zip code, one public library, and are part of a consolidated, comprehensive K-12 school district.

The Penns Grove-Carneys Point School Board of Education consists of nine elected board members who are each elected to three-year terms. Five of these members are from Carneys Point, while four are from Penns Grove. A representative from Oldmans Township is on the Board and votes only on issues involving the High School.
Both Penns Grove and Carneys Point were once part of Penns Neck Township, which in 1683 encompassed the northern part of Salem County. In 1721, Penns Neck was divided into Upper Penns Neck and Lower Penns Neck in order to more effectively control the population. By 1894, the borough of Penns Grove was incorporated. Carneys Point Township, conversely, remained as the last town considered to be Upper Penns Neck until 1976, when it changed its name (Summerill, 1970, p. 9).

The citizens of Penns Grove and Carneys Point had been employed by different companies involved in various industries. Until 1885, two shipyards were located in Penns Grove. During the 1880’s until World War I, the main employers were the three seine fisheries which canned caviar bound for Europe (Summerill, 1970, p. 11). In 1914, the outbreak of World War I in Europe produced a frantic call from the Allied Nations for military explosives. It was then that a small French company located in Carneys Point, known as Du Pont Chambers Works, was able to answer that call. From 1914 to 1918, a tremendous expansion of the Du Pont Chambers Works was required to cope with the international demand for its products. The small smokeless gunpowder plant, constructed in 1891, blossomed into four plants. Within ten years, thousands of people from around the country working around the clock constructed these plants and were later hired to work in them. As a result of the vast expansion of the plant, the populations of both Penns Grove and Carneys Point grew considerably. By the end of World War II, the plants employed 8,000 workers and distributed a bi-monthly payroll of over $500,000. Although recently there have been several layoffs by Du Pont, the company continues to be a major employer both Penns Grove and Carneys Point citizens (Lynch, 1990, p. 2).
By the 1920’s, Penns Grove was a bustling center of commerce. Linked to the rest of the country via the Wilmington - New Jersey Steamboat Line and US 130, the town’s economy prospered. By the end of World War II, Penns Grove was a thriving community boasting a large Main Street Shopping district, a trolley line, a passenger train depot, and an elegant resort hotel where wealthy Philadelphians would come to enjoy the river. As a result, the citizens of Penns Grove enjoyed economic prosperity for the next few decades (Lynch, 1990, p. 4; Summerill, 1970, p. 16).

The 1950’s was a great time for America. The country enjoyed tremendous economic growth and an ever increasing standard of living. Unfortunately for Penns Grove, however, “progress” slowed the town’s economy. The completion of Interstate 295 and the New Jersey Turnpike made traveling on US 130 comparatively slow and unnecessary. The Delaware Memorial Bridge was completed, which allowed quick access to Delaware and tax-free-shopping. It was slowly becoming apparent that the once thriving community was in an economic decline. In 1969, Du Pont’s Plant 1 exploded, killing four plant employees and putting hundreds of their peers out of work as it was never rebuilt (Clement, 1990, p.2). Today, the once busy town of Penns Grove is a conglomeration of vacant buildings. Occasionally, a daring individual will make an attempt at starting a new business only to see it close shortly after opening its doors. Today, some residents are employed by the remaining industries of the twin communities such as: Du Pont, Frangible Discs, Budd Chemical, and Delkote Industries. However, the transient economic success has steadily declined thus causing the Penns Grove - Carneys Point Regional School District to currently endure a rather low socioeconomic status.
According to the 1990 US Census, the population of Penns Grove was 5,228. Of this population, 58.8% was white, 35.5% was black, 5% Hispanic and less than 1% was of some other racial background. School-aged children made up 29.7% of the population while 13.8% of the population consisted of people aged 65 years and older. The median household income in Penns Grove was $21,430 and the average house was assessed at $57,000. For children under the age of 18, 12.9% were being raised below the poverty level.

Carneys Point’s population for that same census was 7,686. For the population in Carneys Point, 82% were white, 15% were black, 2% were Hispanic and less than 1% were of some other racial background. School aged children made up 17.4% of the population, while 17.2% of the population was over 65. The average house in Carneys point was assessed $70,700 and the median household income was $35,206. Of the children under 18 in Carneys Point, 1.9% were being raised below the poverty level. Although the communities are often called “twin” communities, they no longer truly resemble each other demographically (U.S. Census, 1990).

The first school in the Penns Grove-Carneys Point area was established in 1834. The Lafayette Seminary was used until 1912, when a new school was constructed for the influx of children brought in with the Du Pont employees. In 1912, the new Lafayette School was constructed. In 1927, the John J. Pershing School was completed. By 1937, three more schools, the Penns Grove High School, West Harmony Street School, and the Penns Grove Grammar School were constructed in the Penns Grove - Carneys Point area (Clement, 1990, p. 5). Today, the Penns Grove - Carneys Point School District consists of
five schools which are located either in Penns Grove or Carneys Point. The Paul W.
Carleton Elementary School (grades 4-5) and the Penns Grove Middle School (grades 6-
8) are in Penns Grove. The Penns Grove High School (grades 9-12), Field Street
Elementary School (grades 2-3) and the Lafayette-Pershing Elementary School(K-1) are
located in Carneys Point. As a result of the decline in the socioeconomic status of the
communities, the Penns Grove - Carneys Point School District has recently been
classified in the “B” district factor group, with district factor groups in New Jersey
ranging from A to J, where “A” is the lowest group.

Currently, the district provides education for a total student population of 2,263.
Of this number, 1,102 are enrolled in the three elementary schools, 502 in the Middle
School, and 660 in the High School. These students primarily represent three ethnic
backgrounds throughout the K-12 system. For the total student population, 49.9% of the
students are white, 38.8% are African American, 10.8% are Hispanic and less than one
percent represent other backgrounds (Penns Grove - Carneys Point Regional School
District, 1998).

The Penns Grove - Carneys Point Regional School District’s central
administration office, located on 113 West Harmony Street in Penns Grove, houses five
administrators who are responsible for carrying out Federal, State and Local Board
policies, and overseeing the services and operations of the district. These administrative
positions consist of a Superintendent of Schools, an Assistant Superintendent of Schools,
a Board Secretary/Director of Finance, a Supervisor of Federal Programs, and a Director
of Special Services.
Paul W. Carleton School is located at 251 East Maple Avenue in Penns Grove, and is the primary setting for this study. Carleton School houses 322 students in the fourth and fifth grades. There are 168 students in the fourth grade and 154 fifth grade students. Of the students in the school, 51% are white, 36% are African American, 12% are Hispanic, and less than one percent account for other racial backgrounds. The school is administered by one building principal as there are no assistant principals in any of the elementary schools in the Penns Grove - Carneys Point School District. The faculty at the Paul W, Carleton School consists of 24 teachers, 2 secretaries, 1 school nurse, 1 guidance counselor, 4 non-instructional aides, 3 instructional aides, 3 custodians, and 7 cafeteria workers. Five members of the faculty have a Master’s Degree and no teacher at the school has currently earned a Doctoral Degree. The principal is responsible for the supervision of the faculty members as well as the education of the students. The principal also handles the discipline problems which occur within the building. Problems in classrooms, the cafeteria, and playground are dealt with by the principal. (Penns Grove - Carneys Point Regional School District, 1998; Penns Grove - Carneys Point Regional School District, 1999).

Paul W. Carleton School’s statistics, as reported by the 1997-1998 New Jersey Report Card, are aligned with the state average in several areas. Student attendance, average class size, student/faculty ratios and faculty and student ratios match the state average in each category. However, the student mobility rate, which refers to the percent of students who entered or left the school throughout the school year, is a bit higher than the state average of 14.8% with 19.9%.
Significance of the Study

Peer mediation programs are becoming integral parts of schools. As previously mentioned, they are designed to educate students in the principles of conflict resolution while giving them a forum in which they can practice these skills. The programs have been successfully implemented in schools at the elementary level through the high school level and have filtered into some colleges. Studies conducted on these programs have shown that students' violence rates have decreased in the schools where they are implemented.

The significance of the study lies with its benefit to the literature, the school, and most importantly, the students. Although there is a considerable amount of information regarding the establishment of peer mediation programs, this project should add to this research regarding the effectiveness of these programs, particularly at the elementary level.

The peer mediation program should help decrease the number of physical offenses committed by students of the Paul W. Carleton School. It should also help students solve their problems without resorting to violence by giving them peaceful methods for resolving their differences.

Organization of the Study

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a background of the Penns Grove-Carneys Point Regional School District in its relationship to the students it serves within the community and to establish the need for this study to be effectuated.
Chapter two provides a background of the literature, which helps to give credence to the study. Additionally, chapter two guides the evolution of the study from those who initiated peer mediation and examines differentiating points of view.

Chapter three describes, in detail, the design of the study. In addressing the research design of the study, chapter three includes a description of the development and design of the research instruments used in this study, the data collection approach, and the data analysis plan. It is in this chapter that the foundation is established for determining the impact of peer mediation on the behavior of the students in the Paul W. Carleton Elementary School.

Chapter four addresses the data gathered through following the design described in chapter three. In this chapter, the data is presented and described.

Chapter five manifests the study’s major conclusions and implications. This fifth and final chapter states the conclusions and implications for further study. Additionally, this chapter highlights the impact of the study on the intern’s leadership development. It also describes ramifications of how the study could result in an organizational change for the school and possibly the district. Finally, the fifth chapter addresses the need for further study in the area of peer mediation and its role in the collaborative approach to conflict resolution involving administrators, teachers, parents, and students in our schools today.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

“If we are to reach real peace in the world we shall have to begin with the children. . . .”

-Mohandas Gandhi

America’s schools are among the safest places that school aged children can be. The first Annual Report on School Safety, published in 1998 by the United States Department of Education and the United States Department of Justice explains that children are more likely to become victims of violent crime in their neighborhoods or in their homes than at their schools. However, the report goes on to show that “violence does occur in schools, endangering students and teachers and compromising the learning environment.” According to this study, for every 1000 children in American schools, 26 were victims of a school-related crime in 1996. Likewise, 10 out of every 1,000 students were victims of serious crimes either at school, or going to or from school. The report continues that 79 thefts for every 1,000 students also occurred. Although there seems to be a decline in these figures when compared to those reported in 1993, where 164 of every 1,000 students was victimized by crime, these figures still warrants attention. An even more disturbing statistic reported is the number of students who fear going to, coming from, or being in school. In data received in 1995, 9% of the 45,700,000 students
felt unsafe in their respective schools. In the same report, 9% of these students also reported avoiding one or more areas in their school.

Although violence has declined in our schools over the past several years, those in charge of these schools have scrambled to find ways to further decrease the violence occurring there. Likewise, they have attempted to improve the climate of these institutions to enhance the quality of education received. For some students, it is difficult enough to learn in an environment where they feel safe. It is nearly impossible to learn when they are preoccupied with the fear that they may not safely make it home at the end of the day. To help the schools provide their students with safer environments, the US Department of Education has made suggestions in their aforementioned report. Among the other suggestions they make, they urge schools to “implement school wide education and training on avoiding violence.” They also recommend training for students in “social interaction, problem solving, coping, communication, resisting peer influence, understanding values, respect for individual differences, countering bias, anger management, conflict resolution, and peer mediation.” In a similar report, written by the US Department of Education, Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools in 1998, a characteristic of a safe school is one that “emphasizes positive relationships among students and staff.” The report continues that “effective schools foster positive student interpersonal relations - they encourage students to feel comfortable assisting others in getting help when needed.” In order to decrease violence in schools and make them safer than they currently are, programs need to be developed to help children find better ways to handle their interpersonal conflicts.
Conflict has been defined as “controversy or disagreement; to come into opposition” (Schrumpf, Crawford, & Usadel, 1997, p.1); “incompatible activities which may reflect differences in interests, desires, or values” (Deutsch, 1973, p.156); or “an expressed struggle between at least two parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards or resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals” (Hoffman, 1996, p.3). Conflict is a normal aspect of daily life. Both children and adults experience conflict on a daily basis. Conflict is also a normal part of children’s maturation and socialization. Constructively managed conflicts even have many positive outcomes. Conflicts can improve academic achievement, reasoning, and problem solving skills among students. They learn to accept other students’ perspectives, while also learning about themselves (Deutsch, 1993; Martin & Holder, 1994-1995). Successfully resolved conflicts can give students confidence in their problem solving skills and cause them to become more involved in the school setting. The more students learn to how to effectively deal with conflicts, the healthier the tend to be psychologically, especially when dealing with stress and adversity (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, p.17). Unfortunately, many students have little or no personal experiences with how to successfully manage their conflicts or seek resolutions.

When students encounter conflict, they often react with verbal or physical aggression, try to ignore the situation, or try to withdraw from it. They frequently blame themselves for the situation. If the conflict reaches the level of the school administrator, detentions or suspensions often result which can have a tendency to lead to more conflict. Children must be taught to deal with conflict in a way that allows the problem to solved
constructively. Traditionally, students in conflict were encouraged to settle their problems themselves. Recently, however, with the increase in violent acts committed by children in schools, the entire nation has been forced to analyze the methods schools use to resolve interpersonal problems among their students (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, p.2; Schrumpf, Crawford & Usadel, 1997, p.3).

Conflict resolution is typically described as a “process” of settling disagreements through interest-based negotiation to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion. In most conflict resolution programs, it is believed that there are multiple ways to settle conflicts and there are various consequences that result based on how the conflicts were handled. Schools across the country employ one of three major strategies of conflict resolution: negotiation, group problem solving and mediation. Mediation is “a communication process in which the individuals with a problem work together, assisted by a neutral third party, to solve the problem” (Schrumpf, Crawford, & Usadel, 1997, p.2). The mediator, a student who has been trained in the mediation process, helps the disputants develop a mutual agreement. The mediator does not judge, impose a decision, or force a solution. Rather, the mediator strives to create and maintain an atmosphere which encourages problem solving and mutual respect. During mediation, the disputing students listen to each other’s points of view, identify interests causing the conflict, create options that address the interests both of them share, evaluate these options according to objective criteria, and arrive at an agreement. Although the mediator controls the process, the disputants control the final outcome. Should an agreement be reached, a contract is written and signed by the mediators and it is signed by each disputant. This agreement is then
followed for the remainder of the school year. However, if the mediation is unsuccessful or if the agreement is broken, then the disputants may be referred to the principal. (Schrumpf, Crawford, & Usadel, 1997, p.3).

It is important to ensure diversity among the mediators when selecting students to participate. Doing so assures that the greatest number of students in the school see themselves reflected in the group of mediators (Day-Vines, Day-Hairson, Carruthers, Wall, & Lupton-Smith, 1996). Likewise, the group of mediators should be able to respond to the variety of conflicts that will come to mediation. Characteristics of good mediators include having the respect of their classmates, the ability to speak the language of their peers, and the ability to maintain a neutral diplomacy among various peer groups. It should be noted, that academic proficiency and pro-social behavior are often used as requirements to becoming a mediator. However, they are not necessarily to only indicators of who will be an effective mediator (Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, & Modest, 1996).

Peer mediation programs have emerged as one of the most widely used type of conflict resolution programs in schools across the country. (Sweeney and Carruthers, 1996). This may be true for a variety of reasons. These programs are conflict resolution tools that involves very little risk because they are used in conjunction with detention, suspension, or other forms of discipline. They also take the educators out of the role of arbitrating sanctions that rarely resolve the real conflicts in the school. More importantly, however, peer mediation programs are utilized because of the qualities the students mediators offer themselves. Students are able to connect with their peers in ways adults
cannot. They are able to frame disputes in the perspective, language, and attitude of their classmates, making the process age appropriate. Disputants see the process as a way to talk out problems without the fear that an adult will judge them. Finally, when students develop their own solutions, they feel in control of their lives and committed to the plans of action that they have created to address their interpersonal problems (Lane & McWhirter, 1992).

Mary Parker Follett’s research, as reported by Sweeney and Carruthers (1996), is generally credited with the origin of studying conflict resolution. In the 1920’s, Follett examined problem solving as an integration of the needs of those involved. Since her studies, the realm of conflict resolution has grown as a tool used by many other groups in the worlds of business, government, and justice.

The underlying ideals and principles of peer mediation are supported by several educational theorists. Albert Bandura’s Social-Cognitive Theory defines the term self-efficacy to be “the extent to which a person believes that he can perform behaviors that are necessary to bring about a desired outcome” (Bandura, 1996). It is believed that self-efficacy determines our choice of activities, our intensity in effort, and our persistence in the face of obstacles and unpleasant experiences. Self-efficacy has also been shown to promote higher achievement in academic courses. The theory emphasizes that children are the essential agents in their own learning and behavior. Students model, observe, and duplicate others’ responses to social situations. Both intellectual and emotional growth results when a potentially dangerous conflict is resolved, all the disputants “save face” and then continue on with their school lives (Bandura, 1996).
Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory states that children will assimilate and accommodate new experiences into ones previously learned. Their complex and continuous environmental interactions help shape their conceptions of reality. The environment stimulates their curiosity about the situations they encounter and, as they keep interacting with the environment, they build concepts based on their experiences with the external world. Social interaction, especially with the students' peers, enhances this process. Children need to watch and interact with others in order to successfully think through problems and practice these newly observed skills themselves (Shulman, 1996).

John Dewey saw schools as social, scientific, and democratic. He encouraged teachers to offer students opportunities for social participation. He also encouraged the use of the scientific method to solve problems. Through the scientific method, children learn how to think reflectively and to direct their experiences in ways that lead to personal and social growth. Dewey believed that school was a place for collaborative and cooperative inquiry and not a place of coercive or authoritarian rule. Likewise, he viewed education as a social process where the group’s immature members are brought to participate in group life. Peer mediation does offer collaborative and social inquiry while also improving the social conditions of the school. The theories of these three educators give credence to the idea that students learn from each other. They learn not only academics in classroom, but also social interaction and behavior in less structured environments (Sweeney & Carruthers, 1996).

William Glasser has written on control theory in the classroom and developing the quality schools which have endorsed these principles. Interestingly, there are parallels
between Glasser’s ideas and the concepts of peer mediation. For example, in his explanation of control theory, he points out that all human behavior is an attempt to satisfy five basic needs: to survive, to belong, to love, to be free, and to have fun. Similarly, in their peer mediation training manual, Schrumpf, Crawford, and Usadel (1997) indicated that the final four of these needs are potential sources of conflict. “Most every dispute between people involves the attempt to meet certain basic needs for belonging, power, freedom, or fun” (p.44). Another parallel between control theory and peer mediation is the importance of students to actively participate in their learning. He explains how “learning teams” can operate in schools that empower students using methods similar to those found in cooperative learning practices. Through peer mediation, students may also experience a sense of ownership, commitment, and responsibility as a result of being empowered with opportunity to resolve their interpersonal conflicts on their own.

In Glasser’s (1992) explanation of quality schools, he distinguishes between the boss-manager and the lead-manager. The boss-manager leads by authority, while the lead-manager leads by example and collaboration. His “essential elements” of lead managing are that lead-managers engage their workers in a discussion of the quality of work to be done, demonstrate expectations through modeling how it should be accomplished, ask the workers to evaluate their own work, and attempt to establish a non-coercive and non-adversarial atmosphere. These characteristics can easily be identified in the peer mediation process. Instead of teachers and administrators telling students how their problems will be solved, the students themselves find ways to resolve their problems.
The idea of cooperative learning is also fostered in the peer mediation process. Teachers often employ cooperative learning techniques in their classrooms. Deutsch (1993) noted that the two are closely related and work well to support each other. He described many elements that are essential to cooperative learning procedures including positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, and interpersonal skill development. These elements are equally important in the peer mediation process. Likewise, it is important for students involved in cooperative learning activities to realize that it is to their advantage that other students do well. The same effect is seen in peer mediation to the degree that disputants appreciate how a joint resolution to their conflict is to the advantage of both parties involved.

For the hundreds of schools that have implemented peer mediation programs in their schools, there is an equal number of distinct programs. It is necessary for these programs to address the needs of each school and mesh with each school’s environment. There are, however, four general forms that peer mediation programs take in schools (Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, & Modest, 1996; Lane & McWhirter, 1992).

One form is described as the cadre type. In the cadre approach, a small number of students are trained to serve as the peer mediators for the entire school. These students, selected by the faculty of the school undergo intensive training over two days. These students learn what conflict is, the identification of nonverbal communication, effective communication, and the mediation process itself. When problems among students arise, these mediators are scheduled to take the disputing students through the mediation process (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).
The second form of peer mediation taken in schools is the total school approach. Through this total school model, the entire student population is instructed on the principles and practices of conflict resolution and have the opportunity to serve as mediators on a daily basis. As a result, every student learns how to manage conflicts and the experiences they have as mediators reinforce conflict management concepts (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

The third form of peer mediation taken in schools is the elective course approach. In this form, mini-courses on mediation can be taught as part of a social studies or health curricula or mediation skills can be taught as part of an independent course. The course can then serve as a forum for the mediators to conduct mediation sessions, debrief the class after the session, and receive continuous support and reinforcement (Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, & Modest, 1996).

The final form that peer mediation can take is the student club approach. This model involves selecting student volunteers from the entire student population and bringing them together at a time and place outside their regular school curriculum. Training for these mediators may be conducted before, during, or after school, or on weekends. If they are conducted during the school day, out-of-class time can be minimized by having the training session during any free time such as lunch or study hall periods. Mediation sessions are then scheduled before school, during lunch, or after school when faculty facilitators, mediators, and disputants all have available time away from class responsibilities throughout the day (Day-Vines, Day-Hairston, Carruthers, Wall, & Lupton-Smith, 1996).
Regardless of the type of program that is implemented in the schools, the success or failure of peer mediation programs is contingent upon two important circumstances within the school. First is the support received by the program from the administration of the school. Without the support of the principal and administration, no program has the chance to be effective. Secondly, schools that have some evidence of a conflict resolution curriculum for the entire student population to learn seem to be the most successful (Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, & Modest, 1996; Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Sweeney & Carruthers, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

Peer mediation has been successful in finding ways to resolve interpersonal conflicts among students in schools. Agreement rates, the percentage of problems successfully solved, compared to the total number of problems brought to peer mediation sessions gives evidence to the effectiveness of these programs. Here, Koch (1988) reported a 93% agreement rate, and Schrumpf, Crawford, & Usadel, 1997, p.9 (1997) reported a 95% agreement rate. Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) have reported a 94% success rate in students in the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, and Modest, (1996) reported a 97% agreement rate among elementary programs, 98% agreement rate among middle school students and 95% agreement rate among high school students. Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Acikgoz (1994) reported a 93% agreement rate and Johnson and Johnson (1996) reported a 97% agreement rate. These figures provide strong evidence that peer mediation can be successful in initially resolving interpersonal conflicts among students in all educational levels.
The length of these agreements also suggests that peer mediation is an effective means to resolving students’ conflicts in school settings. Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) reported that of the agreements that were established in peer mediation sessions, 98% of them lasted through the remainder of the school year. Koch (1988) reported that 90% of the agreements lasted for the length of the school year. Johnson and Johnson (1996) reported that 90% of the agreements lasted through the remainder of the study.

The effects of peer mediation on the entire population of schools that were studied also indicates that peer mediation is effective. Johnson and Johnson (1996) reported that in one school, the frequency of student conflicts referred to the principal was reduced by 80%. Koch (1988) reported a 50% decline in suspensions for fighting in another school. Lane and McWhirter (1992) have found schools had decreased their fighting incidents by 50% in one school and 47% in another by implementing the schools’ peer mediation programs.

School-based peer mediation programs initiated were developed in middle school settings. They originally seemed to be a perfect match for the students in that age group. However, once the effectiveness of these programs became evident, they began to be developed for the high schools and even the elementary schools across the nation. While high school students seem to be obvious candidates for developing and maintaining peer mediation programs, questions were raised about the ability of elementary students to lead their peers through mediation sessions. Nonetheless, these programs have been effectively developed and implemented in elementary schools. In fact, Deutsch (1993) suggests that students as young as ten years old can be trained in peer mediation. Lupton-
Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, and Modest, (1996), have also reported that mature students in the third and fourth grades can be effective mediators. Peer mediation programs in elementary schools have both similarities and differences compared to those in the higher grades. Like their older counterparts, elementary peer mediation programs are developed to have student mediators take their classmates through the mediation process in order to peacefully resolve their disputes. The student mediators are trained in the same fashion as older mediators are. They go through a two or three day instructional program where they learn, along with their teachers, how conflict arises, verbal and nonverbal communication, and the principles of the mediation process. Once they are trained, they are then capable of taking their peers through the mediation process which is nearly identical to those in the higher grades.

There are few differences between the peer mediation programs at the elementary and secondary levels (Lane & McWhirter, 1992). One difference is the time during the day when mediations are held. In the middle and high schools, students have an easier time scheduling sessions. At the elementary level, students do not change classes and are more apt to be missing class work that needs to be made up more than students in the upper grades. Likewise, the promotion of the programs within the school are conducted differently. In the elementary schools, the students mediators are given special belts, badges, T-shirts, or notebooks to heighten their visibility in the school and promote the peer mediation process. Conversely, many students in the middle and high school levels typically shy away from any unnecessary attention being brought to them. As a result, the program itself is publicized, while the students involved take a less visible stance within
the population of the school. The most notable difference between peer mediation programs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels is the types of problems handled at these levels. Disputes at the elementary level usually involve issues related to sharing, name calling, touching, and hurt feelings. Disputes in the upper grades often involve property, rumors, and he said/she said gossip. (Johnson, Johnson, & Mitchell, 1996; Araki, 1990). Although the disputes heard at the elementary level may seem petty and trivial to those past their teen years, they are real problems to the elementary students. By resolving them through peer mediation, they are learning that the program is effective and will be more likely to use it again in the future. As stated by Johnson, Johnson, and Mitchell (1996), “There is a need for peer mediation programs in primary schools. There is considerable violence among young children in inner-city elementary schools. Kindergarten students can learn to take their conflicts to a mediator. Even third-grade students can mediate their schoolmates’ conflicts successfully.”

The effectiveness of peer mediation programs at the elementary level has been studied by various people and the results have been positive. Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Acikgoz (1994) studied third to sixth grade students in a suburban elementary school. They found that following the peer mediation training, the frequency of student problems reported to teachers dropped more than 80%, while conflicts referred to the principal were reduced to zero. In a study conducted in an inner-city elementary school in San Francisco, California, Johnson, Johnson, and Mitchell (1996), found that conflicts among fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students were resolved 98% of the time after peer mediation was implemented. Lupton-Smith, Carruthers, Flythe, Goettee, and Modest (1996)
reported that a mediation success rate of 97% among students in the third through fifth
grades. Sweeney and Carruthers (1996) found that at one elementary school, 98% of the
conflicts brought the peer mediation were successfully resolved. Therefore, although
students mediators may be young, they can have the capacity to successfully resolve the
conflicts in their schools and help prevent these conflicts from escalating into violent
actions among their peers.

Through peer mediation, all students, both disputants and mediators, find that
within the process they have a place for talking about problems, learning more about the
views of others, and practicing their communication skills in a nonviolent, nonjudgmental
atmosphere. The words of one student summarize peer mediation’s impact:

All I ever wanted to do was fight. If someone said something to me I didn’t like, I
didn’t think about talking, I just thought about fighting. I came into a mediation
session as a disputant with four girls on the other side. I thought, “who needs
this? What am I doing here?” I just wanted to punch these girls out. I
figured that the mediator would tell me what I was going to have to do.
But she didn’t. Instead, she drew me out, listened to me. It felt good to let it
out; then I wasn’t angry anymore. I thought, “Hey, if this can work for me, I
want to learn how to do it.” (McCormick, 1988, p. 54)

Schools should be safe places. They can, however, be made even safer. To help
decrease the violent incidents which occur in our schools on a regular basis, educational
leaders need to develop plans to help students resolve their conflicts. One such method is
peer mediation. Peer mediation has shown to be effective in quelling students’
interpersonal conflicts before they erupt into violent situations. By teaching students that
there are peaceful ways to solve their problems, our schools, and ultimately our society,
should become safer places.
Chapter 3
Design of the Study

**General Description of the Research Design**

This study was developed to identify the effectiveness of a peer mediation program utilizing an action research design. Although a substantial amount of the data in this research is quantitative, the study remains primarily qualitative in nature. Throughout the study, the intern intended to determine whether the implementation of a peer mediation program had increased the use of positive conflict resolution techniques among the students of the school therefore reducing the number of discipline referrals sent to the principal. Likewise, the intern proposed to ascertain the effect Peer Mediation had on the improvement of the overall school climate through this study. Not only were the areas of overall discipline problems in the school assessed, but also evaluated was the corresponding perception of the effectiveness of Peer Mediation by the members of the school. Likewise, the overall perceived climate of the school as it pertains to those who are in attendance at school on a daily basis has been analyzed. To obtain this information, the intern developed a study employing an action-based research design, whereby the intern served as an active participant in both the collection of the data and the guidance given to the students involved with peer mediation as mediators and disputants.
To acquire the information analyzed in this study, the intern utilized a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data. The final conclusions with respect to the study have been made in a qualitative manner, as it was expected that the data gained in the study would not point to a definite conclusion and would, therefore, need to be further explained.

It should be noted that the intern's role in the school during the time of this study was that of an administrative intern. In effect, he served the students as an administrator when he was not attending to his teaching responsibilities. His role, however, in no way confounds the research conducted within this study. The referrals which were sent to the office to be dealt with by the administrator were similarly handled by both the principal and the intern. Neither person had control over the number of student discipline referrals which were sent by the members of the faculty. Likewise, the intern had no influence on the responses provided by those who completed the surveys. Each survey was completed voluntarily and without coercion on the part of the administration, faculty, or the intern.

Development and Design of the Research Instruments

The use of both interviews and surveys has provided the intern with the qualitative data utilized by this study. Each member of the school has been surveyed. Faculty members have provided the intern with qualitative information regarding their perception of the effectiveness of peer mediation. At the same time, the students themselves provided the intern with equally valuable information by completing two surveys, one at the inception of the program, and one at the conclusion of the study.
From a quantitative perspective, the intern has been provided with data indicating the actual number of referrals handled by the administrator on a monthly basis. This material was furnished by the secretaries in the Main Office of the school in the form of monthly and biannual building reports for the 1997 - 1998 and 1998 - 1999 school years. These reports show the number, type, and consequences of discipline referrals handled by the principal each month and are then presented to the administration in the central office of the school district for review. Also used were similar records collected during the 1999 - 2000 school year which were presented directly to the intern regularly on a monthly basis.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The intern chose as the population of the study all students who were enrolled in the Paul W. Carleton School during the 1999 - 2000 school year. Because of the relatively small size of the population, no attempt was made to select a sample. Likewise, a comprehensive sample was used for the teacher and student survey, as there were also relatively small total populations of each within the school. The entire faculty of the Paul W. Carleton School was afforded the opportunity to complete the survey. Likewise, all students were given the opportunity to complete one as well. To gain a third perspective, an interview was completed with administrator of the school. Similarly, the intern has held many discussions with the principal regarding the direction and effectiveness of the program.
Description of the Data Collection Approach

To study the behavioral effects of peer mediation on the behavior of students, both quantitative and qualitative forms of data was collected. Quantitative information for the study came in the form of the number of referrals that were written for the time period between December, 1999 and March, 2000. These numbers were then compared with referrals written during the time period between December, 1997, and March, 1998, and December, 1998, and March, 1999. These numbers were obtained through the monthly reports kept on file in the Main Office at the Paul W. Carleton School.

Surveys and interviews were the main source of information on the effect of peer mediation on the climate of the school. The entire student population was asked to complete the survey, which was copied and given to each teacher. The teachers were then asked to present the surveys to the students and help them complete it as necessary. The teachers were also asked to provide surveys to the students who were not present on the day the survey was administered.

Teacher surveys were distributed to all faculty members via their school mailboxes. Each teacher was provided with a ticket and asked to present it to the intern while delivering their survey. This was used to identify the teacher completing the survey. This allowed the intern to tally the respondents until a 75% return rate was achieved.

Along with the surveys, interviews were used to obtain a third perspective in the climate of the school which provided the intern with additional qualitative data. Interviews with the school’s principal and guidance counselor were completed. Each interview lasted for approximately thirty minutes and was tape recorded.
Data Analysis

The quantitative data gathered was then compared to the figures reported from the previous years. Specifically, the number of referrals was tallied and compared on a month by month basis. That is, the number of referrals submitted by the faculty in December, 1997, will be compared to the number of referrals submitted in December, 1999. This process will be repeated for the following months in a similar fashion.

The surveys and interviews have provided descriptive data addressing the students’, faculty’s, and administration’s beliefs on why peer mediation has or has not been effective for the school. This information addresses issues of whether or not the students use peer mediation to resolve their disputes and whether the climate of the school, with regard to the student population, has improved.
Chapter 4
Presentation of Research Findings

Effectiveness of Peer Mediation on Student Behavior at Paul W. Carleton School

The Peer Mediation program at the Paul W. Carleton School was launched in November of 1999. Following an all day workshop where teachers and student together were trained in the mediation process, the student of the school were afforded the option of resolving their difference through a mediation. This mediation, conducted by these trained students, and facilitated by a trained member of the school’s faculty allowed them to work together to identify peaceful methods of conflict resolution rather than allowing the problems fester where they eventually would result in some form of aggressive behavior.

Since November 1999, 21 mediations have been held involving 43 student disputants who have sought peaceful methods of resolving their interpersonal conflicts. As a result of these mediations, 21 behavioral contracts have been cooperatively developed and followed by the disputants. To date, no contract has been broken, and no further conflict has been reported to the office by members of the faculty or the students themselves. Likewise, the school has seen a decrease in the number of fights and threats made involving its students.
The total number of students referred to the office for violent or aggressive offences for the 1997-1998 school year was 63. This number is representative of the total number of times that students were referred to the main office for either fighting or verbally threatening another student. The number of student referrals made to the office during the 1998-1999 school year for such offenses was 68. Students who were repeatedly referred to the office for similar, yet, multiple infractions on different occasions were considered separate referrals for each incident.

The findings for this study were collected from September 1999, through the last week of February 2000. At this time, the total number of violent offenses committed by the students at Paul W. Carleton School and referred to the principal for disciplinary action were 17. When compared with the referrals reported during the 1997-1998 and 1998-1999 school years, the 1999-2000 school year was similar during the months of September and October. However, for the months of November, December, January, and February of the 1999 - 2000 school year, a decrease in the number of violent and aggressive offenses committed by the students at Carleton School is shown. For the same months during the 1997 - 1998 school year, 30 students were sent to the office for aggressive behavior toward other students. During the 1998 - 1999 school year, 39 students were sent to the office for similar offenses through these same months. However, for the 1999-2000 school year, only 7 students were sent to the office for aggressive behavior during these months. These numbers represent a 40% decrease in these behaviors compared to the 1997 - 1998 school year and a 60% decrease, compared to the 1998 - 1999 school year.
Table 4.1
Number of Students Referred to the Office for Aggressive Offenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Surveys

The teaching faculty at the Paul W. Carleton School consists of 32 teachers. Of these teachers 31 responded. A survey was given to each teacher along with a blank card. After the survey was completed, the they were asked to sign the card and hand it in with the survey. By doing this, the intern could identify who had submitted a survey without identifying each teacher’s survey, thus helping to avoid the Hawthorne Effect. By the collection date, a 97% return rate was achieved. Of the 31 respondents, 45% strongly agreed, 48% somewhat agreed, and 6% had no opinion whether the Peer Mediation Program was effective in helping students resolve their interpersonal conflicts. These results indicate that 93% of the teachers perceive the Peer Mediation Program as being successful. Likewise, 64% of the respondents strongly agreed, 32% somewhat agreed and 3% had no opinion whether Peer Mediation should continue Carleton School. Also, 38% of the teachers reported referring students to Peer Mediation.
Table 4.2

Teacher Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Is Peer Mediation effective in helping students resolve their interpersonal conflicts?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Do you think Peer Mediation should be continued next year?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Did you refer any students to Peer Mediation this year?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Surveys

At the time the survey was distributed, there were 326 students in the Paul W. Carleton School. Of these students, 320 completed the survey. This 98% return rate was attributed to the efforts of the classroom teachers in distributing, collecting, and submitting the surveys. Without their cooperation and assistance, such a high return rate could not have been possible. The surveys had two key items that referred to the success of the program. For the first question, 12% reported using Peer Mediation to help them solve their problems. On these same surveys, 87% of the students reported feeling that Peer Mediation was a good program for them to have at Paul Carleton School.
Table 4.3

Student Survey Responses

Question: Did you use Peer Mediation to help solve a problem with other students?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: Do you think Peer Mediation is a good program for our school to have?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>I Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>311</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal’s Perceptions

The principal of the Paul W. Carleton believes that Peer Mediation has become a valuable tool to assist the students of the school on resolving the interpersonal problems they may experience throughout the year. She identifies the decrease in fights and threats that have occurred this year as a result of the program, when compared to previous years as well as the compared to the beginning of the year. As further support of this claim, the principal also acknowledges the number of students contracts that have been written as a result of the program and the fact that they have been followed, also reducing the number of repeated problems. As stated shown earlier, 100% of the contracts have remained intact. Though she admitted that initially participation had to be suggested by the principal, counselor and intern for the students to use it, the students and their teachers have begun to request the program earlier and more frequently as an option to letting the problems
mount to the point of aggressive behavior or referral to the office for disciplinary purposes. She also suggests that the program is becoming an important part of the lives of the students in that they seem to be using it as a way to address their problems. In addition, the principal has expressed her pleasure and surprise that some parents have called the school to ask that their children participate in the program to address occurrences that have happened both within and outside of school. As she indicates, such a response not only strengthens the program, but also validates the success of the program in the eyes of the parents. This, in turn, helps to further the perception the community has of the school and its dealings with its students.
Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

Major Conclusions and Their Corresponding Implications

To help quell the aggressive behavior exhibited by their students, schools across the country are incorporating conflict resolution lessons into their school programs. Interpersonal relationship skills that were once taught at home are now finding their way into school curricula nationwide. School children today are as likely to be taught how to handle differences of opinion as they are instructed how to compute differences of fractions.

Peer mediation programs have made their way into school programs as well. These programs are designed to teach conflict resolution skills to students while giving them a forum in which they can practice these skills. These peer mediation programs start in elementary schools and continue to the high school level. They use students as third party neutral mediators and trained teacher facilitators to help other students peacefully resolve their disagreements. As a result of these programs, student violence rates have been shown to decrease at all levels of education including the elementary level.

The intern developed and implemented a Peer Mediation program in the Paul W. Carleton School. In a survey completed by the students of the school, 12% reported using
Peer Mediation to solve their interpersonal problems. Of these students, 87% also suggested that Peer Mediation was a good program to have in school. Similarly, 93% of the teachers in the school believed the program to be an effective way for the students to solve their conflicts in a peaceful manner. A qualitative analysis of the contracts written by the students in peer mediation sessions indicates that the students are working together to solve their conflicts rather than allowing them to escalate to a violent level. Quantitatively, the decrease in overall violent offenses among the students suggests that the program is effective. Likewise, the absence of contractual violations by the students who have participated in mediations also indicated the level of seriousness the students hold towards the program. The data collected by the intern during this study indicates that students in elementary grades are capable of successfully participating in peer mediation as both disputants and mediators. Paul W. Carleton School’s Peer Mediation program has been perceived by the intern, the faculty, and the students as being successful in positively affecting students’ behavior in the school.

Organizational Change as a Result of the Study

Prior to the development of the Peer Mediation Program, the students of Paul W. Carleton School had no way of addressing the interpersonal conflicts which arose among them. Consequently, they often resorted to violence to resolve their differences, which ultimately resulted in disciplinary action being taken by the administrator and possibly injury to students. Peer Mediation has provided these students with an opportunity to peacefully address their problems and work cooperatively to identify solutions to these
conflicts. As time progressed, Peer Mediation has become a legitimate facet of the Paul
W. Carleton School. It has slowly, yet increasingly becoming a widely used program for
the members of the school’s student population to resolve their conflicts. The principal
has begun referring students to Peer Mediation for certain cases; faculty members have
begun suggesting to students in conflict that they use the program rather than disciplining
them or referring them to the office; and, most importantly, the students themselves have
also begun requesting participation in peer mediation sessions. In addition, the contracts
established by the disputing students have been taken quite seriously and have remained
intact throughout the study. As a result, the number of students referred to the office for
violent and aggressive behavior such as fighting or threatening another student has
decreased.

The Need for Further Study

This study, using the fourth and fifth grade elementary students of the Penns
Grove - Carneys Point Regional School District, has shown that the implementation of a
Peer Mediation program can be an effective and successful tool in improving the behavior
of children at this age level. However, as with any attempt to alter people’s behavior, it
was not one hundred percent effective. Fighting and verbal threats still occurred within
the school and some students continued exhibiting difficulties with other students that
could not be resolved. Nonetheless, many other students did utilized the program, rather
than fighting, thus decreasing the frequency of students being disciplined for such
aggressive behaviors.
Further study needs to be done in the school over the next several years to determine both the long-term effects, if any, and to determine if the number of fighting and threatening incidences would again begin to rise as the "novelty" of the program wears off. Likewise, further study should be conducted using populations from other similar schools in surrounding districts to determine whether this success is confined simply to the Paul W. Carleton School, or if other districts could also benefit from such a program.

Implications of the Study on the Intern's Leadership Development

The intern, as a result of conducting the study and the accompanying administrative internship, has experienced growth in leadership competencies. He has become enhanced in leadership, communication, organizational management, and group process skills. Specifically, the intern learned to develop the leadership capability of others while improving his own ability to analyze and solve problems using appropriate decision-making techniques. He has improved his level of competency in the use of conflict resolution techniques, the utilization of administrative practices to meet unique needs of students, communication with individuals and groups in a positive manner, and his ability to listen actively and respond appropriately to the ideas and opinions of others. As the founder and the coordinator of the Peer Mediation Program at the Paul W. Carleton School, the intern was able to assume the roles and functions of school-based management by becoming an integral part of the design and implementation of the program. He also gained valuable experience by applying human relation skills in
interacting effectively with students, teachers, parents, and administrators. While functioning as the coordinator and a faculty facilitator, the intern was called upon to analyze and solve problems using learned strategies and techniques to create a schedule for mediation sessions and to help the mediators as they developed contracts for the disputants. The intern was then able to use conflict resolution techniques, listen actively, and respond appropriately to the ideas and opinions of others. These acquired abilities became particularly useful when interacting with students as well as when it was necessary to assist members of the staff and faculty.

Recommendations for Change

The 1999-2000 school year was the first year Peer Mediation was available for the students of Paul W. Carleton School to use as a means of peacefully resolving their interpersonal conflicts. As previously stated in this chapter, Peer Mediation was a success statistically as well as in the perceptions of the teachers and students within the school. Likewise, the Superintendent of Schools, select members of the Penns Grove - Carneys Point Board of Education, and especially the school’s principal, also believe this to be true as evidenced by their continued support for this endeavor by including Peer Mediation in the budget for next year. However, after studying the Peer Mediation program for this year, and after discussions with numerous faculty members, the school guidance counselor, the school’s principal, the Assistant Superintendent of Schools, and the Superintendent of Schools, the intern offers the following recommendations for the further development of the program.
First, Peer Mediation is most effective when students themselves recognize that they are in an interpersonal conflict, and as a result, request a mediation. Student requests should occur much more frequently than referrals by members of the school's staff. Therefore, the intern believes that a conflict resolution curriculum should be developed and implemented in the fourth and fifth grades which instructs the students in conflict resolution techniques and allows the students to become more aware of the option of Peer Mediation if the techniques they learned fail to successfully resolve the problem. This curriculum could be taught by trained classroom teachers as a possible incorporation into the current health program.

During the 1999 - 2000 school year, Peer Mediation only became available to the students beginning in November. Students were identified as possible mediators by their teachers, and they and the volunteering teachers were then trained. The remainder of the faculty was instructed as to the uses of the program, with the student body needing to be informed about the program and its possible uses. In the future, it would be beneficial to have the program start as close to the opening of school as possible. To accomplish this, the identification of possible mediators should be conducted in June of the previous year by fourth grade teachers. These teachers have interacted with these children all year, know them well, and should have better judgement regarding their maturity level. By identifying these students in June, a training session could be scheduled for the first week of September during the following year. Likewise, any faculty member that would like to participate would have the opportunity to make it known by June, thus allowing them to participate in the September training.
Finally, since this was the first year Peer Mediation was available to the elementary aged students of Paul W. Carleton School, students and teachers alike were somewhat apprehensive to use it; however, once they began seeing positive results, the utilization of the program increased. The intern sincerely hopes that the program will continue to flourish in years to come and will be used on a much wider scale. It is his belief that most students seem to take the program seriously and as they grow more accustomed to gaining experience in using the program and see the benefits of its implementation and use, the more effective it will become. As a result, the school will become a more pleasant place to learn and interact positively with one another and will ultimately develop into a more harmonious environment that is more conducive to learning.
References


Appendix A

Program Forms
The Paul W. Carleton School

C

Peer Mediation Program
Please understand, the mediator does not judge, impose a decision, or force a solution. Likewise, teachers who serve as observers or facilitators during these sessions do nothing other than witness the process. However, if the mediation session is unsuccessful or if this agreement is broken, then the disputing students may be referred to the principal.

We believe that our students, like so many others across the country, will appreciate being empowered to work out their differences with minimal input from the principal or their teachers. We are excited with the prospect of starting this program and seek your support in this endeavor. We will contact you shortly to inform you of our progress. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Charles Warfield
Program Coordinator
Dear Parents and Guardians,

Students come to our schools today with considerable knowledge in many areas. Often, they are computer literate with a savvy for surfing the web. They can name the statistics of their favorite football stars or the hobbies of their favorite singer. Many times they are able to cook, clean the house, change diapers, and shop at the grocery store at an age when many of their teachers were just becoming aware of their surroundings.

However, what these children possess in worldliness, they sometimes lack in interpersonal relation skills. More times than not, these responsible children may be quick to fight, become verbally abusive toward other students, or unable to cope with viewpoints other than their own. In order to help these students peacefully resolve their differences, we at the Paul W. Carleton School, will be developing and implementing a Peer Mediation Program for our students.

Peer Mediation is a voluntary communication process in which the students with a problem work together, assisted by a mediator, to solve a problem. The mediator is another student who has been trained in the mediation process. This student serves as a neutral third party who encourages the problem solving process by helping the disputing students reach an agreement together. This formal agreement is then signed by each disputant and is followed for the remainder of the year.
Peer Mediation Request Form

Date: __________________________

Names of Students in Conflict

1. __________________________ Room _______ Grade _______
2. __________________________ Room _______ Grade _______
3. __________________________ Room _______ Grade _______
4. __________________________ Room _______ Grade _______

Mediation is requested by (please check one)

☐ Teacher  ☐ Aide  ☐ Counselor
☐ Student  ☐ Principal  ☐ Nurse
☐ Other (please specify) __________________________________

Where did the conflict occur?

☐ Classroom  ☐ Playground  ☐ Cafeteria
☐ Hallway  ☐ Bus  ☐ Bathroom

Nature of Conflict (please specify):

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Signature of person requesting mediation ________________________________
Dear [Name],

You are scheduled to facilitate a Peer mediation session. Please pick up the students listed below and take them to room ______ at__________ on _____________.

Please put the “Contract” in my mailbox at the conclusion of the program.

Also, thank you for your time and your willingness to serve our students in this capacity.

Sincerely,
Chuck Warfield

**Peer Mediators**

1. ___________________________ Room ______
2. ___________________________ Room ______
Alternate ________________________ Room ______
Alternate ________________________ Room ______

**Disputants**

1. ___________________________ Room ______
2. ___________________________ Room ______
3. ___________________________ Room ______
4. ___________________________ Room ______
5. ___________________________ Room ______
A Peer Mediation Session has been requested for the students listed below. Therefore, they will participate in a Mediation Session on _________________ and will be out of your room at approximately ________________.

They will be picked up by _________________, who will serve as facilitator of the session. This session should last between 15 and 30 minutes, at which time, the students will be returned to class. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your continued support of this program.

- Chuck Warfield

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disputants</th>
<th>Peer Mediators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>___________</td>
<td>______________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>___________</td>
<td>______________</td>
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<tr>
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<td>___________</td>
<td>______________</td>
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<tr>
<td>___________</td>
<td>______________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Peer Mediation Contract

Date________________________

We voluntarily participated in a mediation. We have reached an agreement that we believe is fair and that solves the problem between us. In the future if we have problems that we cannot resolve on our own, we agree to come back to mediation.

Name________________________  Name________________________

Name________________________  Name________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Signature________________________  Signature________________________

Signature________________________  Signature________________________

Mediator Signature________________________

Mediator Signature________________________

Facilitator: Please make one copy for each disputant and return the original to my mailbox.
Thank you - Mr. Warfield
Appendix B

Research Instruments
# Student Survey

Please complete this survey. You do not have to, but I would appreciate it if you did.

Thanks! Mr. Warfield

**Directions:** Please answer each question by circling the way you feel

1. Conflicts in school are caused by:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Maybe</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. problems between two or more students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. problems between students and adults</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. rumors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. poor communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. anger or frustration</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. In school have you experienced:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. put-downs/insults/ teasing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. threats from another student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. fighting with another student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. arguments</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. rumors started about you</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. someone stealing something from you</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. In Carleton School are you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. treated fairly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. treated with respect by adults</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. treated with respect by other students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. allowed to solve problems that affect you</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. In Carleton School, are you:
   a. happy to be in school
      Always  Sometimes  Never
      1        2         3
   b. afraid to be in certain areas of school
      1        2         3
   c. a good student
      1        2         3
   d. afraid to come to school
      1        2         3

5. When you need help in school do you ask?
   Always  Sometimes  Never
   1        2         3

6. If you need help, can you get it from:
   a. a parent
      1        2         3
   b. a brother or sister
      1        2         3
   c. a teacher
      1        2         3
   d. another adult
      1        2         3
   e. another student
      1        2         3

7. Have you used the Peer Mediation program to help work out differences with other students?
   Yes  No

8. Do you think the Peer Mediation is a good program for our school to have?
   Yes  No

What grade are you in? _________

Thank you very much for completing this survey. The information you have given will be used as part of a survey for the whole school. These surveys will be used as part of research being conducted in our school. Thanks again, I really appreciate it!

- Mr. Warfield
Teacher Survey

Directions: Please circle your answer which corresponds to each question or statement. Of course, your are not required to complete this survey, but your input would be appreciated.

1. Did you have any students referred to peer mediation by yourself or someone in the school?
   Yes  No

2. Did you refer any students to Peer Mediation yourself?
   Yes  No

3. Peer mediation is a worth while program for the school.
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree  No Opinion
   4 3 2 1 0

4. Peer Mediation was successful this year in helping.
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree  No Opinion
   4 3 2 1 0

5. I would like to see Peer Mediation continued next year.
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree  No Opinion
   4 3 2 1 0

6. I would like to see peer mediation continued next year.
   Strongly Agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree  No Opinion
   4 3 2 1 0
Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your opinions and comments are a valuable part of this study. - Chuck
Name: Charles A. Warfield

Date and Place of Birth: November 18, 1968
Wilmington, Delaware

High School: Penns Grove Regional
High School Carneys Point, New Jersey

College: Shippensburg University
Shippensburg, Pennsylvania
Bachelor of Science in Education, 1991

Graduate: Rowan University
Glassboro, New Jersey
Master of Arts in School Administration, 2000

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