Peer mediation: one component of student conflict resolution

Alicia A. Erney
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PEER MEDIATION - ONE COMPONENT OF STUDENT CONFLICT RESOLUTION

by
Alicia A. Erney

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts Degree of The Graduate School at Rowan University May 1999

Approved byProfessor
Date Approved April 27, 1999
The study was designed to identify the effectiveness of the peer mediation program instituted at Edgewood Regional Junior High School. A quantitative analysis would establish the validity the program and replace perceptions with statistical documentation. The action based research design compared the number of disciplinary referrals resulting in suspension for fighting or student assault to the number of cases referred to mediation. The student population was comprised of approximately one thousand students in grades seven, eight, and nine. The mediation statistics were compiled on a monthly basis from the information contained on student forms that were kept as part of the program's annual documentation. The discipline statistics reflect data obtained from the monthly disciplinary reports generated for the Board of Education indicating the number of student detentions and suspensions. The statistical results were calculated by using the linear regression model in which the number of mediations was interpreted as the independent variable and the number of student fights was the dependent variable. The correlation coefficient of the linear regression formula was -0.0895, implying no correlation between the two events. The original hypothesis that there would be a negative correlation was unsubstantiated by the data.
MINI-ABSTRACT

Alicia A. Erney

Peer Mediation - One Component of Student Conflict Resolution
May 1999
Dr. Theodore Johnson
School Administration

The study was designed to identify the effectiveness of the peer mediation program at Edgewood Regional Junior High School. A quantitative analysis of the number of suspensions for fighting compared to the number of cases referred to mediation indicated a -0.0895 correlation coefficient, implying no correlation between the two events.
Acknowledgments

The writer wishes to acknowledge the friendship, assistance, and professional expertise shared by Clifton Matthew, Jr. with the intern during the preparation and development of the study, and to my husband and son for their patience and understanding which were unmeasurable in the completion of the project.

Thank you God for always being there to guide me.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

Violence and confrontation are pervasive issues within our culture. Our schools can be viewed as a reflection of the larger community that they serve and as a microcosm of society. In a continuing effort to create a safer school environment for all students and to provide students a means to resolve their conflicts before they escalate to physical confrontations, conflict resolution and peer mediation programs have been established. Available documentation to validate the effectiveness of existing programs is inconclusive or nonexistent.

In an attempt to identify the effectiveness of the peer mediation program instituted at Edgewood Regional Junior High School, this study will analyze the number and type of peer mediations conducted throughout the school year and the number of disciplinary actions taken by the administration during the same time frame. A comparison of mediations conducted over previous school years to the current school year will provide information on the value and effectiveness of the current program.

This study will explore how peer mediation and conflict resolution strategies at Edgewood Regional Junior High School impact on the students' interactions and the number of disciplinary referrals, and will attempt to determine a correlation between the number of student mediated situations and the number of disciplinary referrals during the
Definitions

Within the context of this study, \textit{conflict resolution} will refer to the strategies that enable students, parents, teachers, and adults within the school community to handle conflicts peacefully and cooperatively outside the traditional disciplinary procedures (Girard, 1996). In a school setting, training is conducted for an entire class, grade, or school. Conflict resolution programs attempt to teach students strategies to manage anger, control aggressive responses, understand conflict, and avoid and diffuse potential physical violent confrontation (Powell, McClain and Halasyamani, 1995).

\textbf{Peer mediation} is one form of conflict resolution in which students come together to solve their differences in a risk free way, with the help of a neutral third party and without administrative intervention. In peer mediation, students are trained to mediate disputes of other students through a six step process in which, after listening to both parties, the problem is identified, possible solutions are developed, and ideally, the disputants agree on a workable agreement (Donahue, 1996).

When discussing disciplinary actions and procedures, the intern will identify disciplinary infractions and consequences as listed in the Student Discipline Procedures Manual for Lower Camden County Regional High School District Number One.

Limitations of the Study

The research of the study will be restricted to Edgewood Regional Junior High School and Lower Camden County Regional High School District Number One. The results of the findings may offer insight into the positive and negative aspects of the
program at the junior high school level and suggest possible measures that could impact on the programs conducted within the three other buildings in the district. The results may indicate the future direction for possible improvements to the present peer mediation program.

The data accumulated during this study will reflect the behavior of the present population with no delineation in grade level. The student population may represent an anomaly of an exceptionally good or bad group of students at any one grade level. This study will not have longitudinal data to indicate effects over time.

Setting of the Study

The study will be conducted during the 1998-1999 school year at Edgewood Regional Junior High School, Atco, New Jersey. The junior high school is one of four schools within the Lower Camden County Regional High School District Number One. The total enrollment for the district is approximately 5,500 student in grades seven to twelve. Edgewood Regional Junior High School is located in a rural-suburban area and has a population of approximately 1,025 students in grades seven, eight and nine. Within the school there is a diversity of ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds. The student population is comprised of a racial mixture of about 64% white, 33% black, and 2% Hispanic. There are three assistant principals who supervise the discipline at the school and handle the student referrals for infractions of the school rules.

The district has a designated Drug and Substance Abuse Coordinator to serve the needs of all four buildings in the district. As part of the immediate support staff available to the students, Edgewood Regional Junior High School has a guidance department.
consisting of four counselors and a full time Crisis Counselor.

The school has had an ongoing student peer mediation program for the last four years, with approximately twenty trained student mediators participating each year, two faculty coordinators for the program, and about twenty-five trained staff members who serve as facilitators for any mediation conducted by the students. Student mediation sessions are scheduled by one of the coordinators, usually twenty-four hours in advance. The mediations can be held throughout the school day, preferably during the disputants' scheduled study hall period. If a dispute is of a more immediate nature, the mediation is arranged as soon as possible and may necessitate an adult mediator.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will quantify the efforts of the Peer Mediation program as it exists at Edgewood Regional Junior High School and this project will provide credible documentation to help establish the validity of a program that has existed for the past four years. The perception of the positive effect of the program on the school environment will be replaced with statistical documentation.

Organization of the Study

The preceding pages contain a statement of purpose of this study, a description of the limitations, and the setting in which the study will be conducted. Chapter 2 will consist of a review of the literature related to violence in education, violence prevention measures, conflict resolution and mediation programs in general, and the most recent research studies on the effectiveness of conflict resolution techniques currently in use at all levels of the educational system.
The content of Chapter 3 will address the design used for the study and a description of the population and data collection. The material will include evaluations of all training sessions. The fourth chapter will contain an analysis of the accumulated data and interpretation of the results. Conclusions and implications of the study will be completed in Chapter 5. The summary statement of the study will include noted patterns of student behavior as a result of the peer mediated interventions and suggested recommendations for further study.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

School Violence

Public awareness of the number of incidents in which students are involved in violent behavior while at school has increased during the last several years. The more recent events in schools in Oregon, Pennsylvania and Kentucky have heightened community concern for the safety of their students. Conflicts between students are increasingly resulting in fatalities, not the more typical fist fights of previous decades. The increased frequency of reported violence in the schools reflects an inability of the students to handle conflicts in safe constructive ways (Rogers, 1994). While no recent nationwide study of the real extent of youth violence is available, regional studies indicate that youth violence is increasing. Incidents of school violence have found their way into suburban and rural communities, public and private schools. Our current problems are no longer identified as solely an urban public school problem due to poverty and family dysfunction (Schwartz, 1997).

Every year there are nearly three million incidents of theft or violent crime in or near schools (Sherman, 1997). Statistics indicate the victims include both teachers and students. According to the National Education Association, 900 teachers are threatened and over 2,000 students and nearly 40 teachers are physically attacked on school grounds every hour of each school day each year (Futrell & Powell, 1996). In a National School
Boards Association survey (1994) of 720 school districts, 82% reported increasing violence over the last five years, and 60% reported weapons incidents. Statistics parallel the perceptions of teachers who were surveyed by the National Center for Educational Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education. In the surveys conducted every three years, a sample of some 5,000 public school teachers, at both the high school and elementary level, consider both verbal abuse of teachers and physical conflict among students to be serious or moderately serious problems. Results of the complete survey confirm that public schools have been becoming less and less safe in the last decade (Shen, 1997).

Who are these victims? The more likely victims of physical assault (fist fights, bullying, and shoving matches) are students in grades six to ten who come from a racial or ethnic minority group. The most prevalent type of youth crime is theft in which students who wear expensive or fashionable clothing or jewelry, or who bring electronic devices to school, are more likely to be targets and victims. Among the teachers included in the analysis of school violence, statistics indicate, although women and younger, less experienced teachers are targets, it is the teachers who are considered to be strict disciplinarians that are the most at risk (Futrell & Powell, 1996).

Students need the assurance of a safe school environment, and without it they cannot learn. In a survey conducted by Learning Publications (cited in Rogers, 1994) eight percent of students did not attend school one day a month because they feared for their safety. More than 41 percent of teenagers surveyed by Children’s Institution International said they do not feel safe in school (Sherman, 1997). It is this need to provide a safe
school environment that is reflected in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act that states, "By the year 2000 every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a discipline environment conducive to learning" (cited in Futrell & Powell, 1996).

Teachers and administrators agree that most children in school are well-behaved and eager to learn. They point to family breakups, conflicting value systems and exposure to violence that ultimately impacts on a child's behavior (Wright, 1997). The lack of parental control, the decrease in the number of two-parent families, and the lack of father figures in many families may contribute to increasing aggressive behavior and the increase in school violence (Elam & Rose, 1995). According to other critics, the increase in violence can also be attributed to violence in movies, on television, and in popular songs, and compounded by the ready availability of drugs and weapons (Ascher, 1994). The situation is complicated by the fact that, at the end of each school day, students return to an environment that contradicts everything a teacher tries to do during the day. Children are frustrated and confused living in two worlds with different standards (Wright, 1997).

Conflict is a normal, natural part of everyday life. Although the word conflict has its roots in the Latin word conflictus, meaning "striking together", conflict and violence are not synonymous (Trevaskis, 1994). Deutsch (cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1996a) defines conflict as a state of incompatible behaviors. A conflict of interest results when the actions of one person attempting to reach his or her goals prevent, block, or interfere with the actions of another person attempting to reach his or her goals. The better educators and students understand the nature of conflict, the better able they are to manage conflicts constructively (Johnson & Johnson, 1996a). Opotow (cited in Johnson, Johnson, Dudley,
Mitchell & Fredrickson, 1997) points out that while an adolescent’s life is inundated with conflicts, they offer opportunity for positive outcomes such as clarifying personal identity and values, increase in social status, and promoting personal growth. However, in many cases, the potential, positive outcomes are never realized, because adolescents tend to manage their conflicts in destructive ways which lead to violence, disrupting the instructional process and student learning in the schools (Trevaskis, 1994).

Conflicts will not go away. It is suggested that without direct training students may never learn to manage conflicts constructively. In order to make schools orderly and peaceful places, conflicts must be managed without physical or verbal violence. Generally there are two types of programs that help to control and contain unwanted behavior in schools - violence prevention programs and conflict resolution training programs (Johnson & Johnson, 1996b).

**Violence Prevention**

The efforts needed to face the complex problem of school violence must include students, the school, the community, parents, law enforcers, courts, and religious leaders. The key elements of a safe-school plan are prevention, intervention, education, and involvement of everyone (Sherman, 1997).

Many schools have included metal detectors, zero-tolerance rules for drug use and weapons possession, security guard or police support officers, locker supervision, and the elimination of backpacks in schools (Sherman, 1997). Other safe-school practices include visitor badges, locked doors, sign-in procedures, security cameras, mirrors, handheld radios, and emergency communication networks. Such measures may limit violent acts in
school but do not attack the causes of violence (Trevaskis, 1994).

The best way to handle violence in the school and prevent its spread throughout the community is to defuse disputes before they turn violent (Trevaskis, 1994). Webster (cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1996b) found that in schools that have adopted a violence-prevention curriculum, there was no evidence that such programs produced long-term changes in violent behavior or risk of victimization. Other studies of 51 violence prevention programs (Wilson-Brewer cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1996b) showed fewer than half even claimed to reduce levels of violence, and most did not have data to back up their claims. The main function of violence prevention programs is to provide "political cover" for school officials and politicians (Webster cited in Johnson & Johnson, 1996b). Although communities spend a large amount of school funds on security measures every year, the end result of their efforts make schools look more like prisons. The strategies for the most part have not eliminated violence from schools (Futrell & Powell, 1996).

Several possible reasons offered as an explanation for why violence prevention programs do not work include: poorly targeted population, ignoring the fact different people turn to violence for different reasons; development of materials without focusing on the implementation of the program; confusion between school and neighborhood settings in which the street conflicts involve competition for status and power in contrast to the school which is a cooperative setting in which conflicts involve working together solving problems among students who are in long term relationships; and unrealistic measures of the strength of the social forces that impel children toward violence (Johnson & Johnson, 1996b). In the opinion of Johnson and Johnson (1996b), schools need to go
beyond violence prevention to conflict resolution training.

Conflict Resolution - Peer Mediation

Violence prevention implies both a need and a program, a part of which may address conflict resolution skills. The National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) was founded in 1984, and from its inception, the number of school-based conflict resolution programs have grown from approximately 50 to more than 5,000 in 1995 (Girard, 1996) to more recent estimates of 7,500 to 10,000 programs nationwide (LeBoeuf & Shabazz, 1997).

Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs have their roots in one of four earlier projects. The research-based peer mediation programs began in the 1960s. The focus of the program was to teach all students in school the nature of conflict. Nonviolence advocates began a conflict resolution program in 1972. The main influence came from the Quaker Church. Their project taught all students that the power of nonviolence lies in justice, caring, and personal integrity. Other projects were initiated by anti-nuclear war activists and the legal profession (Johnson & Johnson, 1996a).

The concept of conflict resolution is rooted in the view that we are all responsible for creating a peaceful school community (Townley, 1995). In an effort to create a safer school environment, communities have adopted conflict resolution and peer mediation training. While conflict resolution and peer mediation often are talked about and implemented together, they differ. Conflict resolution training provides training to an entire class, grade, or school. In contrast, peer mediation is provided to a few selected students (Powell, McClain & Halasyamani, 1995).
Conflict resolution generally refers to strategies that enable students to handle conflicts peacefully and cooperatively outside the traditional disciplinary procedures (Girard, 1996). Conflict resolution projects teach students to manage anger, control aggressive responses, understand conflict, and avoid and diffuse potentially physically violent confrontations (Powell, McClain & Halasyamani, 1995). Peer mediation is a specific form of conflict resolution utilizing students as neutral third parties in resolving disputes (Girard, 1996). In peer mediation, students are trained to mediate disputes of other students of the same relative age by arriving at mutually acceptable solutions to their conflicts. Peer mediation gives young people the capacity to alter their own behavior, that of others, and, by extension, the culture of society at large (Townley, 1995).

In peer mediation, a third person helps the disagreeing parties solve their own problems. The process allows students, who are in conflict and looking for a way out, an alternative to solving the problem while saving face. Mediators are required to complete basic training of a minimum of 12 to 15 hours followed by additional follow-up sessions. In training, mediators learn to follow a six step approach to problem solving. The objective is to keep the lines of communication open until both sides can agree upon a satisfactory solution.

The mediation begins when the mediator sets the stage and lays the ground rules. It is then a process to identify the problem by listening to both parties, refocusing the problem, generating possible solutions and having disputants agree on a workable agreement (Donahue, 1996). The entire process gives the students ownership and responsibility over the final outcome. Both mediators and disputants benefit from
mediation. Student mediators learn to listen effectively, summarize accurately and think critically. They develop skills on how to solve problems, to lead, to write, and to foster meaningful discussion among disputants (Trevaskis, 1994). Disputants learn similar lessons while learning to resolve conflicts by non-violent ways. They develop a capacity to empathize with others.

**Research Studies**

The popularity of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs has resulted in reports claiming a positive impact within the school. The reports however, tend to provide descriptive, anecdotal accounts and are not supported by actual research data (Johnson & Johnson, 1996a). To date there has been little research to validate the effect of conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs. Surveys conducted among teachers, administrators and peer mediators (Metis Association, Pont cited in Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Mitchell & Fredrickson, 1997) perceived less physical violence among students and a more caring behavior among students. Additional benefits for the students who have completed training suggest mediators were more likely to resolve conflicts by talking things out, were more confident in their ability to help others, functioned better at home and at school, and improved their grades (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Mitchell & Fredrickson, 1997).

Available data suggests some projects may modify youths self-reported attitudes about violent behavior, improve school discipline and reduce absenteeism. A review of three major research projects, representing a variety of geographical areas in the United States and one in Canada, generally support the effectiveness of conflict resolution and/or
peer mediation training programs (Powell, McClain & Halasyamani, 1995; Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Green & Laginski, 1997).

In an elementary school (K-6) in Florida, "The Fighting Fair Model" was integrated into the curriculum in one class in each of the grades 4, 5, and 6. The results were measured against three control classrooms. During the seven week program, the experimental group pre and post-test results indicated the curriculum improved conflict resolution behavior in students and supported conflict resolution projects as useful and beneficial.

In Maryland, a peer mediation project was monitored in an elementary school (K-5). The initial presentation was made to the entire student body as an overview of conflict mediation theory and was followed by training of student mediators (grades 3-4-5). There were five two-hour sessions over a two week period with meetings biweekly to improve mediation skills. Statistics showed that over a two year period student mediators resolved 311 incidents; there was an increase in the faculty and the student attendance, a decrease in disciplinary suspensions from four the year before the project to one during each of the two years of the project, and a decrease in the referrals to the principals's office.

The results were much less definitive in the case study in Missouri in which two elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools participated in a peer mediation project. An outside consultant was hired to train the school counselors. The counselors trained the student mediators. Although school officials were supportive of the program, the statistics did not support the outcomes. Disciplinary figures from the previous year were unavailable for comparison with discipline during the term of the
project. When a comparison was made to a similar school without peer mediation, the figures showed a higher rate of suspension at the mediation school.

Another study conducted in a middle school in North Carolina analyzed a combined conflict resolution and peer mediation project. Sixth grade students were taught about conflict resolution and "The Rules for Fighting Fair" during three 50-minute classroom periods. Twenty-six students were selected to be trained in peer mediation. After a one year period, sixth grade disciplinary referrals dropped 82%, suspensions from school dropped 97%.

Each of the preceding summaries indicate differences in the way conflict resolution and peer mediation projects are implemented. They vary in age, number of trained school staff, and duration of training. Overall the studies suggest conflict resolution and peer mediation may reduce the frequency of fighting and other undesirable behaviors at school, increase knowledge and modify students' attitudes about conflict, improve school discipline and increase attendance. However, observations are based on so few data they must be considered speculative. (Powell, McClain, & Halasyamani, 1995). Evaluation is necessary. Quantitative analysis, rather than perceptions, will enable school officials to know if conflict resolution and peer mediation activities are having a positive effect on the school environment.

Johnson & Johnson have been involved in two different empirical research studies to determine the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs. The first project involved using a pretest-posttest, control group experimental design in a midwestern middle school with 198 students in grades six through nine. Analysis showed significant difference
between experimental and control groups in the knowledge of the negotiation procedure and the ability to apply it to actual conflicts (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Mitchell & Fredrickson, 1997).

The independent variable was training in conflict resolution and peer mediation procedures conducted three days a week during 25 minute homeroom periods. The training program combined integrative negotiations and perspective-reversal procedures. The integrative negotiations procedures focused disputants on finding a mutually satisfying solution to the problem, and the perspective-reversal procedures focused the students on viewing the conflict from both points-of-view.

The dependent variables were administered in a paper-and-pencil form to the treatment and control groups before the beginning of the training and within one week following the end of the training. The first was the "How I Manage Conflicts" measure and the second was a "Conflict Scenario" written measure. The results indicated students who had received training had mastered the negotiations procedures and could effectively apply them in resolving conflicts. The students' strategies for managing their interpersonal conflicts moved from destructive to constructive and as a result of training, students were able to regulate their own behavior, giving them a developmental advantage over individuals who cannot regulate their actions. The positive results of the study indicate there is now some documented evidence to confirm the benefits of conflict resolution and peer mediation training in the schools.

A second project involved forty students in ninth grade English classes in a suburban high school in Ontario. The design of the research integrated conflict-resolution
training into a literature unit. Researchers were to determine the program's impact on academic achievement, the learning of the conflict resolution procedure, and students' ability to apply the procedure to classroom conflicts (Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Green & Laginski, 1997). Again a pre-post, experimental-control group design was implemented. The experimental group studied a novel and received conflict resolution training integrated into the academic material, while the control group studied the novel without training. The dependent measures included a paper-and-pencil test in which students responded to 17 open-ended questions about the novel, the "How I Mange Conflicts" measure, and a "Conflict Scenario" written measure. According to the results, combining conflict resolution training with the study of a novel has a significant and positive effect on students' academic achievement. An additional benefit to the infusion of conflict resolution training within the curriculum is that it eliminates the frequent teacher frustration that may occur when he or she is expected to adopt and teach a new program in addition to the already required academic subjects (Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Green & Laginski, 1997).

Conclusion

There is no one answer to solving the problems associated with violence in our schools, and there will be no quick fixes. Programs need continued review and evaluation relative to individual schools. Efforts must continue to make schools centers of learning where students may pursue their education without the fear of violence. Classrooms need to become places where destructive conflicts are prevented and where constructive conflicts are used to improve the quality of classroom life (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Mitchell & Fredrickson, 1997).
Chapter 3
The Design of the Study

Description of the Research Design

The study contains a compilation of data reflecting the number of peer mediated sessions conducted during the 1998-1999 school year at Edgewood Regional Junior High School. The action based research design compared the number of disciplinary referrals resulting in suspensions for fighting or student assault to the number of cases referred to mediation. The design of the quantitative descriptive research was created to establish the overall effectiveness of the program and to determine the reduction, if any, in administrative interventions among students. The study describes the procedures implemented during the training of student mediators and the conflict resolution programs conducted for the instructional staff and district school bus drivers.

Development and Design of the Research Instruments

The premise for the quantitative analysis was based upon the statistics compiled from the "School Mediation Program Data Input Record" (see Appendix A). The form was created by Peer Mediation Programs, Inc. for the expressed purpose of program evaluation. The Data Input record provides for the input of information comparing mediation statistics with disciplinary data. The form was designed to indicate the number of cases referred to mediation, the number of cases settled prior to mediation, the number of mediations conducted, and agreements signed. Disciplinary statistics include the number
of suspensions, detentions, violent incidents, and the number of student absences.

The mediation statistics for the study were compiled on a monthly basis by the peer mediation coordinator from the information contained on the completed student forms that are kept as part of the program's annual documentation. The discipline statistics reflect data obtained from the monthly disciplinary reports generated for the Board of Education indicating the number of student detentions and suspensions. The figures reflecting the number of student absences were developed on a monthly basis from statistics generated from the attendance program.

As part of the analysis of the program, the student training sessions are discussed and the subsequent evaluations indicate perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program as determined by the participants. The student evaluation form (see Appendix B) was developed with input from the peer mediation coordinators. Similar reviews of the evaluation forms completed by the instructional staff (see Appendix C) and the school bus drivers (see Appendix D) describe the effectiveness of the adult conflict resolution programs.

Description of the Sample

The study was conducted during the 1998-1999 school year at Edgewood Regional Junior High School, located in a rural-suburban area at the southern end of Camden County. During the study, there was a population of approximately 1,025 students in grades seven, eight and nine. The student population contained a racial mixture of about 64% white, 33% black, and 2% Hispanic. There were three assistant principals who dispensed with student referrals and who were responsible for the general supervision
of the discipline within the school.

The peer mediation program was organized and supervised by two members of the teaching staff. As coordinators, they were responsible for the training of about twenty student mediators, the scheduling of mediation sessions among students, and the maintaining of the records of scheduled mediations. There were approximately twenty-five trained staff members who volunteered to serve as facilitators for any mediation conducted by the students.

The annual student training session, held in September, included twenty-five students involved in a two-day program conducted during the normal school hours. The students were instructed in the general concepts of conflict resolution and introduced to mediation skills and techniques that they were expected to apply while assisting in the settlement of student disputes. Approximately forty school bus drivers participated in one of two, three hour, evening sessions to develop awareness of conflict resolution techniques. The skills and techniques that were discussed could be used with students on the bus or with any confrontational person with whom they met. The instructional staff was provided with similar information during a one and one-half hour in-service training program. The teachers were encouraged to promote the program within their classes as a means of settling minor student disputes before they escalated to major problems.

Description of the Data Collection

The data for the study was compiled at the end of each month. The number of student mediations conducted and the number of student suspensions, detentions, and absences were recorded on the Data Input Record. All information was collected from the
official school records and reports.

In addition, each mediation and conflict resolution training session concluded with the participants completing a corresponding evaluation for the particular training session. The participants’ comments were collated and analyzed.

Description of the Data Analysis

The statistical data was compiled over a six month period. The comparison of the number of administrative disciplinary measures for student fighting or assaults to the number of student mediations completed on a monthly basis established a relative degree of effectiveness of the overall program. As a result of the correlational study, it was anticipated that there would be a negative correlation in which the greater the number of mediations would imply a decrease in the number of student suspensions from school.

The data analysis contains a tabulation for each of the three groups that participated in conflict resolution or peer mediation training sessions. The consensus from each group provided the basis for guidelines for future presentations.
Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Findings

The design of the study was developed to quantitatively analyze the impact of the peer mediation program on the number of student referrals at Edgewood Regional Junior High School. Disciplinary measures resulting in suspension from school for fighting in the building were of primary interest. The original peer mediation program was initiated during the second semester of 1994 - 1995 school year. Since that time the number of student mediations has declined as shown in Table 1. In an effort to revitalize the program and to create a greater student awareness of how to resolve conflicts, training programs in conflict resolution and peer mediation were developed for students, teachers and school district bus drivers.

Table 1

Peer Mediation Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Cases Referred</th>
<th>Mediations Conducted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994 - 1995&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995 - 1996</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996 - 1997</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997 - 1998</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> The peer mediation program was initiated in January of 1995.
Training Programs

During September of 1998, the entire student population attended an assembly program, “Quiet Riot.” The goals of the program were to try to build a sense of community, encourage self-respect and respect for others. The assembly program served as the initial activity to make all students aware of the school wide peer mediation program and how it could help them to settle disputes in a peaceful manner. Shortly afterward, the student body was given information about the training for new student mediators. From the student volunteers, twenty-five students were selected to participate in the two day training program. The goals of peer mediation were discussed along with the role of the peer mediator. The students were instructed on the sources of conflict and the ways in which people respond to conflict. The six steps in the peer mediation process were described. Mock mediation sessions were conducted. The students participated in role playing and brainstorming activities during twelve hours of training. The two day training session was conducted by the peer mediation coordinators who are certified trainers.

The district bus drivers were asked to attend one of two, three hour evening sessions in which conflict resolution strategies were presented. Their attendance was optional. A total of forty-three district drivers attended. The group was given information identifying the major sources of conflict and the resulting responses of people facing conflict. All the participants were asked to complete the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument to provide each person with an understanding and self-awareness of how they personally handle conflicts in their lives. The instrument was self-scored. The school bus
drivers were also given suggestions on how to defuse anger and tips for crisis prevention.

The instructional staff attended an in-service program on October 30 at which time the goals of the peer mediation program were reviewed, and a similar program as presented to the bus drivers was conducted by the building peer mediation coordinators. The teachers were also given information on the principles of the Peaceable Classroom and how they could be infused into the daily and weekly instructional routines.

**Evaluation of the Training Programs**

Immediately following each training session, the participants were asked to complete an evaluation of the presentation. Each group was in agreement the sessions were beneficial and helpful in stimulating discussion and creating awareness of potential confrontational situations. Each group was asked to answer three similar questions. As shown in Table 2, each group generally ranked the presenters' information, written materials and overall training experience as good or excellent. The students were asked a fourth question indicating their readiness to mediate disputes. Their responses demonstrated a high degree of confidence in their ability to conduct a mediation session.
Table 2

Training Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
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<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the trainers provide you with helpful information?</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>How would you describe your training experience overall?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel prepared to mediate disputes between students?</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bus Drivers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the presenter provide you with helpful information?</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did the printed materials provide you with helpful information?</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe the training experience overall?</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Teachers</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
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</table>
Collection of Disciplinary Data

For the purposes of this study, the student disciplinary figures were compiled from September 3, 1998 through February 26, 1999 as indicated in Table 3. The total number of student detentions served during after school hours and on Saturdays showed some variation from month to month, December being the month having the largest number of students assigned to detention. The number of student detentions increased with the number of school days in any given month. Student detentions are generally assigned by the administration for minor infractions of school policies ranging from lateness to class or school, cutting a teacher detention, disruptive behavior, bus misconduct, or teacher referrals of a less serious nature.

The record indicates an increasing number of suspensions from school peaking in February with slight declines in December and January. A student suspension from school is a result of infractions that are more serious in nature or are imposed due to the consequences of previous misbehavior having increased with multiple offenses. Table 4 identifies the major infractions warranting suspension from school.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Sept</th>
<th>Oct</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
<th>Jan</th>
<th>Feb</th>
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<td>Mediation Program Statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cases referred to mediation</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cases settled prior to mediation</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Mediations conducted</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Refusals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
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<td>Discipline Statistics</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Suspensions</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>71</td>
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<tr>
<td>Detentions</td>
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<td>200</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>167</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>1378</td>
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<td>1591</td>
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Table 4

Out of School Suspension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplinary Infractions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple referrals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student misconduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus misconduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting detention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting Saturday detention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lateness to class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profanity projected in public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profanity directed at staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profanity directed at student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination towards staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving school grounds without permission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone threats/911 calls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unauthorized demonstration/disruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewdness/Sexual Action, Exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage/Vandalism School/Personal property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession of dangerous object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was believed the peer mediation program would demonstrate its greatest impact among students who find themselves in a situation that may lead to a physical confrontation because they have not tried to talk over the problem. Peer mediation provides an outlet for students to solve their differences with the help of a neutral third party before the situation escalates to physical assault resulting in the automatic suspension from school. During the first four months of school, there was an average of six fights a month involving two or more students. The average number in January and February was four. As shown in Figure 1, the findings show no correlation between the number of mediations to the number of suspensions for fighting at school.

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1.** Monthly comparison of the number of cases referred to mediation to the number of fights among students.

The accumulated data for the first six months showed an increase in the number of student mediations over the past two years, but not as good of a response as in the initial
year of the program. The current school population has approximately two hundred less students in the building. Data on the number of fights from previous school years was unavailable. The researcher cannot conclude that the average of six student fights each month was more or less than previous years.

The statistical results were calculated by using the linear regression model in which the number of mediations was interpreted as the independent variable and the number of student fights was identified as the dependent variable. The correlation coefficient of the linear regression formula was -0.0895. Although the coefficient was negative, statistically no correlation between the two events can be established. The original hypothesis that there would be a negative correlation between the number of student suspensions for fighting and the number of peer mediations cases was unsubstantiated by the data.
Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to identify the effectiveness of the peer mediation program instituted at Edgewood Regional Junior High School. The degree of success was to be measured by the quantitative analysis of the number of peer mediation cases conducted each month compared to the number of disciplinary incidents for fighting. After analyzing the data collected over the first six months of the 1998-1999 school year, it was determined that there was no correlation between the number of mediation sessions conducted by the students and the number of physical confrontations among the student population. The measure of correlation was determined to be -0.0895. Although the coefficient was negative, statistically no correlation between the two events can be established. The study contained data over a short interval and may have been a contributing factor that prevented the confirmation of a more definitive correlation. Similar data from previous years was unavailable for the study. During the study, there was an average of 10 cases referred to mediation each month, the average number of mediation cases conducted was 6.7, while there was an average number of 5.3 student altercations. As indicated by the resulting linear regression formula, \( y = a + bx \), where \( a = 5.458 \) and \( b = -0.012 \), there could be as many as five anticipated incidents of student fighting per month, the number of peer mediation cases having no statistical impact.
Implications

Since the inception of the peer mediation program, the general perception of the administration and the instructional staff has been that the program serves as a positive influence for all students who avail themselves of the conflict resolution process. Teachers have continued to support the program by serving as facilitators and by their continued vigilance to recommend students to mediation. The proactive approach in deterring confrontation among students has been received as a positive worthwhile effort.

The teacher in-service evaluations indicated the written materials and speakers' presentation was excellent as well as the overall in-service experience. The students and district bus drivers were also in agreement that their respective training was good. The data indicated that the most cases referred to mediation occurred in October, the month during the training and immediately following the school wide assembly program. There must be a continuing informational campaign to heighten the students' awareness of the opportunities to use mediation. The possibility of conducting a second assembly program during the school year may be a feasible alternative. Students must be convinced that the peer mediation process allows students who are in conflict and looking for a way out, an alternative to solving the problem while saving face. Students must be willing to assume ownership and responsibility for their actions. Allowing students to develop solutions to minor problems without adult intervention proved to be an effective tool for the administration. On the average, cases referred to mediation were concluded in thirty minutes. Student discussions and resolutions provided the administration with additional time to attend to other more critical issues.
Over the duration of the study, the intern observed a revitalization of the peer mediation program. Teachers and students participated in training programs that contributed to their personal and professional development. The students who participated in the conflict resolution training learned positive behavior management strategies that will allow them to handle conflict constructively. The program provided the students with decision making and communication skills that will help them to interact more effectively with their peers. The renewal of the peer mediation program as an alternative solution to handle student conflicts constructively allowed the intern to be part of an ongoing effort to create a positive school climate.

**Further Study**

In an effort to replace the perception of the positive effect of the peer mediation program on the school environment with statistical documentation, data should reflect a comparison of statistics over a longer period of time. A longitudinal study would provide the necessary feedback. The program's overall validity may be substantiated by including input from the three other schools within the district. The coordinators in each building should convene periodically to share ideas and concerns about the mediation program.

Another aspect often associated with the number of student confrontations within a building is the overall student population. During the study, the student enrollment was at a lower level than previous school years. The number of students was approximately equal to the functional capacity of the building. As the student population increases within the limited physical restrictions, minor instances may escalate to physical confrontations. It would be expected the number of cases referred to mediation would increase.
proportionally. Population figures within the district reflect an expected increase in student enrollment over the next several years resulting in anticipated over crowded conditions. It will be imperative that the administration and staff be prepared to help the students adjust and cooperate with each other, and to implement strategies to create the safest possible school environment for everyone.

The peer mediation process when utilized in conflict situations can diffuse an incident. Students in conflict will not always seek assistance from counselors, teachers, or administrators and frequently react with negative behavior. Peer mediation is a viable alternative to solving conflict in the school. Although the peer mediation statistics accumulated for the study did not support the staff’s positive perception of the effectiveness of the program, with additional data, the program may indeed prove to be an invaluable tool in achieving a safe school environment for the students and staff.
References


Psychology. 137, 11-22.


ERIC Clearinghouse for Law-Related Education.

Appendix A

School Mediation Program Data Input Record
SCHOOL MEDIATION PROGRAM DATA INPUT RECORD

SCHOOL: ________________________________ YEAR: ________________

I. Mediation Program Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SEP.</th>
<th>OCT.</th>
<th>NOV.</th>
<th>DEC.</th>
<th>QTR.</th>
<th>JAN.</th>
<th>FEB.</th>
<th>MAR.</th>
<th>2ND QTR.</th>
<th>APR.</th>
<th>MAY</th>
<th>JUN.</th>
<th>3RD QTR.</th>
<th>YEAR TOTALS</th>
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II. Discipline Statistics

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>NOV.</th>
<th>DEC.</th>
<th>QTR.</th>
<th>JAN.</th>
<th>FEB.</th>
<th>MAR.</th>
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<th>APR.</th>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This form has been provided by Peer Mediation Programs Inc. for evaluation purposes.
Appendix B

Student Mediation Training-Evaluation Form
Having completed the peer mediation training sessions, we would value your opinion about the training program and your experiences during the past two days.

Please CIRCLE your answer.

Your grade: 7 8 9

PART I

For the following questions, please respond by circling the appropriate number on the scale of 1 to 5.

1. Did the training manuals provide you with helpful information? 1 2 3 4 5
2. Did the trainers provide you with helpful information? 1 2 3 4 5
3. Do you feel prepared to mediate disputes between students? 1 2 3 4 5
4. How would you describe your training experience overall? 1 2 3 4 5

PART II

Please fill in your response to the following in the space provided.

1. What did you find the most helpful about Peer Mediation training?

2. What did you find the least helpful about Peer Mediation training?
3. What did you like most about Peer Mediation training?


4. What did you like the least about peer Mediation training?


5. Do you have any other suggestions or comments?


Appendix C

Teacher Conflict Resolution Training-Evaluation Form
EDGECOM REGIONAL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
CONFLICT RESOLUTION
October 30, 1998

Please take two minutes to answer the following questions. Your input will be helpful to us when planning future programs.

PART I
For the following questions, please respond by circling the appropriate number on the scale of 1 to 5.

1. Did the presenters provide you with helpful information? 1 2 3 4 5
2. Did the printed materials provide you with helpful information? 1 2 3 4 5
3. How would you describe the program overall? 1 2 3 4 5

PART II
Please fill in your response to the following in the space provided.

1. What did you find the most helpful about the Conflict Resolution program?

2. What did you find the least helpful about the Conflict Resolution program?
3. Do you have any suggestions or comments about the program?
   
   
   
   
4. Check one: Male ________ Female ________

5. Numbers of years teaching in the district ________
Appendix D

School Bus Drivers Conflict Resolution Training-Evaluation Form
It has been our pleasure to bring the Conflict Resolution program to you. We would like to continue to assist you in making the safety of all students to and from school our priority. It will be helpful to us if you would please complete the following questions.

PART I

For the following questions, please respond by circling the appropriate number on the scale of 1 to 5.

1. Did the presenter provide you with helpful information?  
   [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5

2. Did the printed materials provide you with helpful information?  
   [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5

3. How would you describe the program overall?  
   [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5

PART II

Please fill in your response to the following in the space provided.

1. What did you find the most helpful about the Conflict Resolution program?

   [__________________________________________________________________________]

2. What did you find the least helpful about the Conflict Resolution program?

   [__________________________________________________________________________]
3. Do you have any suggestions or comments about the program?


4. Check one: Male ______ Female ______

5. Numbers of years driving a school bus _______
## Biographical Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Alicia A. Erney</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Sterling Regional High School, Somerdale, NJ</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Master of Arts, School Administration, Rowan University, Glassboro, NJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present Occupation</td>
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