

Difficulties Conflicting Students Face during Mediation from Peer Mediators' Perspective

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Paper Presented at the
24rd Annual International Association of Conflict Management Conference
Istanbul, Turkey
July 3 – 6, 2011

Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to analyze the difficulties conflicting students encountered during mediation process as identified by peer mediator students. The study utilized semi-structured interview technique. Interview forms were used as data collection instrument and 45 peer mediators (24 females and 21 males) were interviewed. Results of the study indicated that conflicting students had certain types of difficulty in various areas while completing the five steps of the mediation process. The most prevalent of them was the difficulty and inability of the disputants to express their needs-reasons and their emotions-reasons. Similarly, mediator students also observed a certain level of emotional resistance by the conflicting students at this step. Thus, conflicting students either failed or showed resistance when attempting to look at the issue from the other's perspective or empathize with them. As a direct result of this, conflicting students also experienced some difficulty in presenting solution alternatives and either failed to arrive at a solution or came up with self-serving ones. Furthermore, particularly male peer mediator students expressly stated that conflicting students had some difficulty in the last step of reaching an agreement.

Key Words: Peer Mediation, Conflict Resolution, Negotiation

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal conflicts and disputes are natural and unavoidable in schools. Students often fall into dispute due to different needs, interests, goals and demands and they sometimes negotiate, sometimes estrange themselves and other times resort to violence. Peer mediation is one of the most widely used programs that aim to teach students to negotiate their disputes. Basic goal of these peer mediation programs is to help students negotiate their shared problems face to face, in an integrative and peaceful manner through the facilitation of a peer. The expected outcome is for the disputing students to renegotiate their problems in the presence and facilitation of a peer mediator, instead of resorting to destructive and violent conflict resolution strategies when they fail to reach a constructive, fair and peaceful agreement on their own.

Peer mediation is voluntary participation of an unbiased third party in a structural process whereby two or more disputants negotiate and reach an agreement (Girard, Refkin & Townley, 1985, cited in Messing, 1993). Mediation is a process which facilitates resolution of a conflict: an unbiased third student helps the disputants in discussing and managing their conflict. According to Bickmore (2002), mediation is a voluntary process where the disputants get help in resolving their conflict yet retain the control over the agreement. Mediator, on the other hand, is an impartial individual who helps two or more disputants resolve their conflict. Mediator has no power over either one of them. Mediator does not dictate what to do or comment on how to determine who is right or who is wrong. Mediator stands between the two parties and assists them in following the steps of the mediation process to reach a reasonable and fair agreement (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). It is the disputants' responsibility to suggest solutions, make the final decision, and to reach a mutually acceptable solution (Messing, 1993). Mediator assists the disputants review all aspects of the problem (often the reasons), suggest making changes and concessions and reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Since the process is democratic and does not entail blame assignment, it also minimizes estrangement that would likely be caused by traditional, autocratic disciplinary methods (Moriarty & McDonald, 1990, 1991; cited by Tolson & McDonald, 1992). Mediation offers students choices and alternatives, involves them in the decision making process, instills in them a sense of ownership of the agreement reached and helps

them take responsibility for their actions and consequences (Thompson, 1996). Therefore, mediation is an effective model which has significant impact on students' daily lives and offers an effective approach in managing their daily problems (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991).

The effects of conflict resolution and peer mediation education programs on student conflicts have been investigated by many researchers world-wide. Various studies, depending on the theme they focused on, revealed some significant and insignificant results. In a study where they examined the effects of peer mediation on high school students' conflicts, Tolson and McDonald (1992) report that peer mediation resulted in a decrease in student interpersonal conflicts. Furthermore, they also report that male students were more successful in mediation, yet they warn that this finding should be treated with caution since the sample consisted of fewer female students with uneven distribution. At least 75% of the students in the study stated that they were satisfied with the process in every way. A similar study with high school students by Lupton-Smith and Carruthers (1996) reported that during the first year of the study 75 of 80 mediation sessions were concluded with agreement. Researchers also report that during the second year of the study, 55 of the 57 mediation sessions resulted in agreement. During the two years of the study, a total of 95% of the mediation meetings resulted in agreement (Lupton-Smith & Carruthers, 1996). Another similar study on the effectiveness of peer mediation programs on primary school students' conflicts by Thompson (1996) revealed that (a) expulsions decreased by 18.5% in the first year, (b) expulsions decreased by 50% during the first two years, (c) during the first two years 90% of the mediations resulted in integrative agreements, (d) majority of the referrals to mediation were initiated by the students, and then by the teachers and administrators respectively, (e) 92% of the teachers believed that mediation worked and boosted the morale of the school (Thompson, 1996). Similar findings were reported by Turnuklu, Kacmaz, Sunbul and Ergul (2010) who concluded that, during a two-year study, 240 of the 253 mediations (94.9%) resulted in integrative and peaceful agreements. Types of agreement reached were negotiating an agreement (51%), promising to end the offending behavior (28%), and apologizing (9%). A total of 88% of agreements reached were of integrative and peaceful nature. The remaining agreements were seemingly integrative but less positive, such as avoidance/not talking.

A meta-analysis of peer mediation studies by Burrell, Zirbel and Allen (2003) who advocated that a clear goal of mediation was to give the students an opportunity to solve their own problems with the help of a peer instead of grown-ups doing it for them, reveals that in 23 studies, 4028 of 4327 mediations ended in agreement (93%). This high success rate indicates the success of mediation programs in the schools. However, reaching an agreement is not the sole criterion in determining the success of mediation programs in schools. Disputants should also be satisfied with the process. Results of the meta-analysis of school-based mediation programs seem to testify to the effectiveness of such programs. This study demonstrated that training students to understand conflict and teaching them appropriate conflict resolution strategies to solve their disputes successfully can be used in primary and high schools effectively. Basically, conflict resolution skills can be taught to students and they can employ these skills in mediating their friends' conflicts and helping them reach an agreement (Burrell, Zirbel & Allen, 2003).

As can be seen in the results of the above studies, the effects of peer mediation education on student conflicts have been investigated by many researchers and positive results were reported. However, hardly any study in the field seems to have dwelt on the mediation process itself, or the experiences and difficulties students encountered. A review of the related literature yielded no findings related to the difficulties conflicting students experienced during the mediation process while following the steps of mediation. Therefore, the current study aimed to analyze, from the peer mediators' perspective, the difficulties conflicting students encountered during the mediation process.

Peer mediation is a process which consists of certain steps that help disputants identify and solve their shared problems. Peer mediation model used in this study included the following five steps: (1) explain to the other party the problem, demands and underlying reasons, (2) explain the emotions and underlying reasons, (3) understanding the other party's demands, emotions and underlying reasons (empathy), (4) produce solution alternatives to the benefit of both parties, (5) agree on a mutually acceptable (win-win) integrative and peaceful solution. Five skill areas emerge from the model used in this study: expressing oneself, explaining the demands and reasons, empathizing, producing solutions and agreeing on a solution. These five skill areas are inherently important and hard to accomplish.

Peer mediators are expected to observe disputants follow these five steps and facilitate by directing questions, active listening, and reframing. One of the goals of this study was to analyze, through peer mediators' perspective, the difficulties conflicting students experienced while following these five steps.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized semi-structured interview technique. Basis for that decision was to elicit in-depth and detailed verbal data related to the personal experiences of the peer mediator students. In this study, difficulties conflicting students encountered while following the five standard steps of mediation were identified through peer mediators' perspective. These five steps were as follows:

- 1) Having the disputants explain the problem, their demands and underlying reasons
- 2) Having the disputants explain their emotions and underlying reasons
- 3) Having the disputants explain what they understood from the other party's emotions and underlying reasons
- 4) Having the disputants produce solution alternatives to solve their shared problem in an integrative and peaceful manner
- 5) Helping the disputants reach an integrative and peaceful agreement

Peer mediator students were interviewed about the difficulties conflicting students encountered while following the five steps of mediation.

Participants

The study was conducted in a high school located in Izmir, Turkey which served students from low SES families, and which reported an increased number of conflicts and higher incidence of interpersonal violence among students and which was interested in such intervention programs. Majority of the students come from impoverished families that had migrated from various parts of Turkey. The "Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation" (CRPM) training program was administered to the first-year students by the researchers for two years. A total of 830 students from 28 classrooms

received training. Following the training, 12 peer mediator students were selected from each classroom by their friends. The peer mediators selected by their friends served as mediators in teams of two, for two weeks each. Upon completion of their terms, mediator students were interviewed about their mediation process experience using semi-structured interview forms. Only the students who served as mediators and who mediated multiple conflicts were interviewed to ensure data collected reflected the reality. A total of 45 (24 females and 21 males) mediator students were interviewed.

Instrument

In this study, semi-structured interview forms were used to collect data. Questions on the form aimed to elicit mediator students' experiences and perceptions during the mediation process. Some of the open-ended questions on the form included the following:

- What were the difficulties conflicting students had while explaining the problem, their demands and underlying reasons?
- What were the difficulties conflicting students had while explaining their emotions and underlying reasons?
- What were the difficulties conflicting students had while explaining what they understood from other party's demands, emotions and underlying reasons (while empathizing with each other)?
- What were the difficulties conflicting students had while producing solution alternatives?
- What were the difficulties conflicting students had while reaching an integrative and peaceful agreement?

Before the actual interviews were held, the interview form was used with five students and items were checked for clarity. Necessary changes were made accordingly and interviews were held. With the permission of the participants, interviews were digitally recorded so as not to disturb the natural flow of the conversation. These recordings were later transcribed into text.

Procedures

The study was conducted in a high school for two years. For two consecutive years, the first year students were given CRPM training. The CRPM training program was developed based on current literature in the field, such as by Bodine, Crawford, and Schrupf (2002a), Bodine et al. (2002b), Cohen (1995), Girard and Koch (1996), Johnson and Johnson (1995a), Johnson and Johnson (1995b), Schrupf, Crawford, and Bodine (1997a), Schrupf, Crawford, and Bodine (1997b), Simpson (1998), and Teolis (1998). The 31-class-hour training program covered four basic skills; understanding the nature of interpersonal conflicts (eleven hours), communication skills (four hours), anger management skills (six hours), and interpersonal conflict resolution skills (ten hours).

The CRPM training program was presented to the students during the 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 academic years. The program material consisted of a teacher's book and a student book. The training sessions were held in the school during school hours, and involved individual learning, whole-class teaching, and pair-work and group-work activities. Scenarios were provided and role-play activities were carried out frequently. Before working with students, teachers were also trained to ensure a parallel between the teachers and the students in order to achieve school-wide reception of the program. By the end of the fall semester of 2007-2008 academic year, the training was completed and peer-mediation model was initiated and observed the following three semesters.

Student input was used as selection criteria in appointing the peer-mediators. Students in each classroom were asked to name three class-mates they would trust and seek help from in resolving their interpersonal conflicts in a constructive and peaceful manner. The three class-mates students named were then run through a frequency test and the most popular students were appointed as classroom peer-mediators. Hence, those students who earned the trust and support of their friends were given

priority. In each class, 12 peer-mediators were appointed with ideally equal gender distribution where possible.

After the peer-mediators were selected, the peer-mediation process commenced. In teams of two, for two weeks each, peer-mediators mediated their friends' conflicts. Therefore, throughout the semester, peer-mediators were also involved in the process as likely disputants. At the beginning of their two-week turns, the peer-mediators were once again trained for two hours using more scenarios and role-playing techniques to assist disputants in negotiating their shared problems to reach a mutually satisfying wise agreement, and to make sure mediation report forms were completed properly. The purpose of this was to form a standard procedure among the mediators.

Analysis of Data

Data collected through semi-structured interview were analyzed through content-analysis. Content-analysis was performed based on the model of Johnson, Johnson, Mitchell, Cotton, Harris, & Louison (1996). First, all responses to questions on the semi-structured interview form were read to gain an orientation to their contents. Second, the responses provided by "45" peer mediators were categorized. Third, related categories were combined into more general categories (happiness, excitement, elation, feeling different, helpfulness, self-esteem, self-confidence). Fourth, once the categories were determined, the rater reread each form and classified the responses into the appropriate categories. Student responses were coded into predetermined categories by one of the researchers. After data in each category were coded, frequency and percentage figures based on gender were computed. Excerpts from student statements for each category were also provided. Before the final coding intra-rater reliability was checked (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Responses were coded by the same researcher twice, one week apart. The results of both codings indicated 94.23 % reliability.

FINDINGS

In this study, mediation process was carried out in five steps: (1) disputants' taking turns to explain the problem, their demands and underlying reasons, (2) disputants' taking turns to explain their emotions and underlying reasons, (3) disputants' taking turns to explain what they understood from each other's demands, emotions and underlying reasons (empathizing with each other), (4) disputants' producing solution alternatives, (5) disputants' reaching an integrative and peaceful agreement. These steps were facilitated by the mediator students. Basic functions of the mediator were to direct questions, and reflect and verify what was being explained. Difficulties in each step were analyzed separately. All mediators used the mediation forms to walk the disputants through the five steps. A total of 45 (24 female, 21 male) mediators were interviewed. Data collected were analyzed using content analysis. Results of the analyses may display discrepancies between the frequency and the total number of mediators due to the fact that some mediator statements fit several categories or some mediators did not provide any answers for some items.

Table 1 presents the analysis of mediator students' perception of the difficulties conflicting students had while explaining their demands and underlying reasons

Table 1 Difficulties conflicting students had while explaining their demands and underlying reasons.

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
1. No difficulty	1	5	5	28	We didn't have any difficulty / They didn't have any difficulties / I didn't see them having any difficulty / They didn't really have any problems talking / They were able to say their demands / I mean they were both telling the truth and they really understood each other.
2. Difficulty in expressing themselves	11	52	5	28	They can't express their demands and their reasons / they couldn't explain their reasons, their demands fully, they also have a lot of difficulty / But they couldn't tell their demands, their reasons / what do you want and why? They avoid answering these. They find it difficult / Some of them come to the mediation in such a way that they don't even know what they want / they backed a little at first because they didn't know exactly the reasons of their demands / you know they couldn't

					focus. There were times I repeated the first question many times / first of all they don't know what they want.
3. Inconsistency in statements	1	5	3	17	Now, when they tell what happened things they say don't match. They would tell different things. They accuse each other of being a liar / sometimes there were lies
4. Emotional resistance	3	14	3	17	Actually they didn't look at each other. I mean, because they both regret what they have done talking face to face about it was even harder for them / some, for example, remember the incident, some are still in shock, and don't remember it / the hard part for them was that they talked to each other rudely- they didn't want to talk but they couldn't stop themselves / they couldn't even sense their own problems because they got into a conflict with their eyes closed / They had a little difficulty because they didn't trust us
5. Biased account of the problem	4	19	2	11	He explained what he wanted, what had happened but from their perspective, saying he was right / they try to tell the incident focusing on themselves all the time / it's like this all the time, how should I say, because they always look at things from their perspective / they all see it from their angle / when they tell the incident they all see their side, not their friend's / They always think that they are right. You know, they think that they were right because they haven't listened the other disputant.
6. Negative statements	1	5	-	-	they always talk in an accusing way, like, if you hadn't done that , this wouldn't have happened. They forget that's why they had a conflict in the first place.
Total	21	100	18	100	

As can be seen in Table 1, difficulties students had in this step were grouped into six categories: “No difficulty”, “Difficulty in expressing themselves”, “Inconsistency in statements”, “Emotional resistance”, “Biased account of the problem”, “Negative statements”. Male and female mediators had differing opinions about the difficulties in the first step. Few female mediators (5%) and 28% of the male mediators believed disputants had no difficulty in this step. Types of difficulties also vary according to the gender of the mediators. While male mediators named difficulty in expressing themselves (28%), inconsistency in statements (17%), and emotional resistance (17%); female mediators listed difficulty in expressing themselves (52%) and biased account of the problem (19%). Both male (52%) and female (28%) mediators believed conflicting students had difficulty explaining the problem, their demands and underlying reasons. They believed that conflicting students were not fully aware of the reasons of their demands, and thus, had difficulty expressing themselves. Similarly, both male (11%) and female (19%) mediators believed conflicting students gave a biased and

subjective account of what the problem was. There was a tendency among the disputants to insist on their version of the problem and try to prove themselves right. In doing so they did not listen or try to understand each other which sometimes led to tension between the parties. Another difficulty mentioned by both male (17%) and female (14%) mediators was the emotional resistance while expressing the demands and the underlying reasons. Among the leading areas of resistance disputants displayed was the feeling of shame and remorse caused by the language they used during the conflict. Similarly, mediator students also stated that disputants were usually involved in the conflicts without their control and had little awareness of what and why they were faced with. In contrast, though few, both male (17%) and female (5%) mediators named inconsistency in statements as another area of difficulty. Mediator students claimed that there were, at times, some inconsistencies in the disputants' statements and they would call each other liars.

Results of the analysis of mediator student statements regarding difficulties conflicting students had in the second step of mediation process, “explaining their emotions and the underlying reasons” are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Difficulties conflicting students had while explaining their emotions and underlying reasons.

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
1. No difficulty	7	32	4	22	They can explain their feelings well / Of course, they can express their feelings / They didn't have any difficulty / They were able to express their anger / Yes, they expressed them easily / They didn't have much difficulty / They express their feelings. I mean, when you ask both disputants they talk about their own feelings / Indeed, they can express. I mean one kid says "I am very sorry. We don't hear the word 'sorry' from a boy who is considered to be "tough"
2. Difficulty in expressing feelings	8	36	9	50	They feel nervous / They can't express their feelings you know / there weren't any definite and clear answers / When expressing their feelings they had a little, you know, difficulty / While expressing their feelings they always say that they were sorry / They can't give right answers when they are angry / While they were expressing their feelings they look at each other and felt nervous / They couldn't explain properly / They can't express their feelings fully / they couldn't reflect their feelings completely / They had a little difficulty because they were talking in a rude manner.
3. Emotional resistance	5	23	2	11	They gave hints about their feelings / they don't want to give themselves away / I think they weren't realistic while expressing their feelings / They couldn't express /

					In the beginning they only see themselves right, I think because they are angry, the other disputant is always wrong. That's why I think they can't express / I don't think they are sincere when talking about their feelings
4. Negative statements	-	-	1	6	They provoke each other while expressing their feelings. They don't reveal their true feelings.
5. Fear of humiliation	2	9	1	6	They didn't want to tell it to the other disputant at first. They want the other to start. They don't want to express their feelings in the beginning / They think that if they talk first the other disputant will think less of them, you know / they have difficulty. I mean they can't say that they are sorry. They can't say that they couldn't take the insult.
6. Not trusting the mediator	-	-	1	6	They don't really trust us.
Total	22	100	18	100	

As can be seen in Table 2, difficulties students had in this step were grouped into six categories: “no difficulty”, “difficulty in expressing feelings”, “emotional resistance”, “negative statements”, “fear of humiliation”, “not trusting the mediator”.

Types of difficulty in this step emphasized by both male and female mediators were similar. Firstly, 32 % of the female mediators and 22% of the male mediators believed disputants had no difficulty in this step. On the other hand, 36% of the female mediators and 50% of the male mediators observed that disputants had some difficulty in expressing their emotions. Mediator students stated that disputants were uncomfortable expressing their emotions; they were tense and, thus, had some difficulties. Especially, when conflicting students faced each other while expressing their emotions they got upset again and failed to do so. Another difficulty identified by the mediator students (23% female and 11% male) was the emotional resistance displayed by the disputants while expressing their emotions. Since each party considered themselves right and the other party wrong they had some difficulty expressing their emotions or avoided them altogether.

Results of the analysis of mediator student statements regarding the third step of mediation; difficulties conflicting students had while empathizing with each other” are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Difficulties conflicting students had while empathizing with each other

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
1. No difficulty	7	33	5	26	They empathized with each other, I mean they didn't have any problems / They empathize with each other / I don't think they had any problems / I believe that they didn't have any problems / They don't have any problems while empathizing with each other / There weren't many problems / They could empathize with each other. There weren't any problems / There weren't many problems there either
2. Difficulty empathizing	8	38	7	37	They couldn't empathize with each other / They sometimes have difficulties / While empathizing with each other they couldn't put themselves in other's shoes / they couldn't put themselves in other's shoes much / They find it a little difficult / While empathizing with each other they are generally having problems / They can't emphasize with each other. Everyone said what he/she thought
3. Misleading	1	5	-	-	They try to tell the other's feelings while pushing their own thoughts forward
4. Resistance to empathy	5	24	7	37	Actually, they know what their friends feel, they can't um! Express themselves, I think / they think that they are right. They don't want to understand the other, because they want to be right now, so they can't empathize, or they empathize but don't say it / They don't want to be in their position because then the other becomes right / They generally don't want to empathize / They realize what they did was wrong, um, they don't put themselves in other's position, I mean, in case he gets humiliated or offended / They always saw it from their side / They don't put themselves in each other's position because they are in a fight, when they do, they are afraid to realize that the other is right / Like they are accepting the other's suggestions and this is in a way submitting to the others, so they couldn't stand that.
Total	21	100	19	100	

As can be seen in Table 3, difficulties students had in this step were grouped into four categories: “no difficulty”, “difficulty in empathizing with each other”, “misleading”, and “resistance to empathy”. Both male and female mediator students (33% female and 26% male) claimed that conflicting students had no difficulty empathizing with each other. However, 38% of the female and 37% of the male mediators believed that disputants had difficulty empathizing. Furthermore, 37% male and 24% of the female mediators stated that disputants displayed resistance to empathy. This may very well stem from the concern that empathizing with the other party might make them see that

the other party might be right. In order to avoid this possibility they refrain from empathy. Similarly, fully aware of the damage their behavior might cause on the other party, they avoid facing the tangible results of what they have done.

Table 4 presents the results of the analysis of the mediator statements regarding the difficulties conflicting students had in the fourth step of the mediation process “producing solution alternatives”. As can be seen in Table 4, difficulties students had in this step were grouped into five categories: “no difficulty”, “difficulty in finding solution options”, “finding biased solution options”, and “Expecting the solution from the other party”, “insincerity”.

Table 4 Difficulties conflicting students had while finding solution options

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
1. No difficulty They didn't have any problems	6	29	6	32	They didn't have any problems / They didn't have many problems because both parties favored the same solution / They could find solutions/ Of course, they find solutions / Our friends were able to find solution options / They did find solutions / They didn't have many problems on this
2. Difficulty in finding solution options	4	19	4	21	In general, not many solutions options were presented / They had difficulty finding solution options / They already have difficulty in finding solutions / Neither of them could find solutions / They had a lot of difficulty / They have a lot of difficulty / They can't find solutions
3. Finding biased solution options	8	38	7	37	Because he came up with a solution option for himself, uhm, he doesn't think of the other party / They present the solution options suitable for themselves. They don't think of the other party / Everyone wanted their opinion to count, that's why there were complications / They try to present solutions in such a way that they would get the upper hand, not the others / They both think that they could impose their ideas on the other / In general, at first, I mean, you know, they present solution options that they could win / Both parties chose to win, they didn't think of the other party / They both tried to find the most suitable solution for themselves / They think that the other won't accept their solution, so they don't offer one.
4. Expecting the solution from the other party	2	10	-	-	For example one of them talks, the other says “there is no need for me to talk” / They expect the solution from each other, they can't agree on a common solution.
5. Insincerity	1	5	2	11	They aren't sincere / They try to promise things that they couldn't do

Total	21	100	19	100
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Both male (32%) and female (29%) mediators thought that conflicting students had no difficulty while producing solution options. However, 19% of the female and 21% of the male mediators stated otherwise. Furthermore, 38% of the female and 37% of the male mediators believed that conflicting students produced biased solutions. Table 4 shows that disputants often ignored the other party’s needs and interests and insisted on self-serving solutions. They tended to focus on their own interests and impose their solutions and produce solution options only they win.

When this result is considered in relation with the finding in the previous table about empathy it is very meaningful. It is difficult for the disputants to come up with a fair, integrative, peaceful and mutually acceptable solution unless they understand each other, look at the issue from each other’s perspective and seeing the damage and suffering of each other.

Table 5 presents the results of the analysis of the mediator statements regarding the difficulties conflicting students had while reaching an integrative and peaceful agreement.

Table 5 Difficulties conflicting students had while reaching integrative and peaceful agreements

Categories	F	%	M	%	Student Statements
1.No difficulty	17	85	8	50	They didn’t have any problems there / No problems / We didn’t have any problems / I didn’t have many problems / They didn’t have any difficulty / They didn’t face many problems.
2. Some difficulty	3	15	6	38	They can’t find a peaceful solution / They are having a lot of problems / They usually do / I couldn’t see anything constructive or peaceful, yet, you know? / It was quite difficult.
3. Evasive agreement	-	-	2	13	I mean, they didn’t have many problems in making peace you know, they say they are ok here, but it’s still the same in class. (they don’t keep their words) They are just saying it here.
Total	20	100	16	100	

As can be seen in Table 5, difficulties students had in this step were grouped into three categories: “No difficulty”, “Some difficulty”, “Evasive agreement”. Both male and female mediator students

(85% female and 50% male) claimed that conflicting students had no difficulty reaching an agreement. However, 15% of the female and 38% of the male mediators stated that disputants had some difficulty reaching an agreement. Furthermore, several male mediators indicated that disputants produced evasive agreements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, peer mediation process was formulated as a five-step process. Facilitated by the mediator, in turns, disputants verbally expressed themselves at each step. Mediator students reported similar difficulties in the first (disputants' taking turns to explain the problem, their demands and underlying reasons) and second (disputants' taking turns to explain their emotions and underlying reasons) steps as experienced by the conflicting students. The most prevalent difficulty in both steps was the difficulty in explaining their demands and emotions and the underlying reasons. This difficulty was reported both by female and male mediator students. Since the study was conducted at a low-SES high school which served students from disadvantaged families who migrated from various parts of Turkey, students' socio-cultural backgrounds, their upbringing and family dynamics may have impacted their language skills, self-expression abilities and problem solving strategies. Another difficulty brought forward by the mediators in these steps was the emotional resistance displayed by the conflicting students. This may be caused by the fact that, in the heat of the conflict, disputants often went too far with their discourse and later felt embarrassed during mediation and failed to express themselves.

Similar difficulties were reported for the third step (disputants' taking turns to explain what they understood from each other's demands, emotions and underlying reasons; empathizing with each other). Mediator students emphasized that disputants often failed to empathize or showed resistance to empathy. First and foremost, empathy is a difficult skill to develop. An individual who never witnessed empathy growing up and socializing might have a hard time building empathy with other people. Therefore, students' social and emotional development plays an important role in this difficulty area. The reason for the resistance to empathy might be caused by the fact that students were concerned that if and when they build empathy with the other party they would realize the extent of

hurt their behavior might have caused. Therefore, to avoid this embarrassing situation and the likelihood of other party being right they may have refrained from empathy.

Two types of difficulty emerged from the mediator student statements regarding the fourth step; “difficulties conflicting students had while producing solution options”. These were “difficulties in producing solution alternatives” and “finding biased solution options”. Both these should be considered in relation with the third step of building empathy. Since the conflicting students failed to empathize with each other they were unable to look at the problem through each other’s perspective. Thus, they had difficulty seeing the other party’s version of reality and failed to reach a mutually beneficial agreement or came up with biased solution options. Difficulties in the fifth step of mediation process were especially brought forward by the male mediators. Disputants had some difficulties reaching an integrative and peaceful agreement.

Two themes emerged when the difficulties conflicting students had in these five steps, as reported by the mediators, were considered together. First was the difficulty in expressing their demands, emotions and the underlying reasons. Second was the difficulty in looking at their shared problem from each other’s perspective, i.e. empathizing. Both types of difficulty can be accounted for by a skill area developed in the long run and which reflects both family dynamics and school’s pedagogical orientation. The fact that high school students experience difficulties in these skill areas clearly emphasizes the importance of developing and providing guidance and counseling services starting from preschool years and making it available throughout.

Note: This study was financed by Dokuz Eylul University as part of a research project titled “Effects of Negotiation (Problem Solving) and Peer Mediation Education on High School Student Conflicts” No: 2006.KB.EGT.001.

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