


Peer Mediation: What School Counselors Need to Know

by

Sarah Rose Dummer

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Masters of Science Degree  
In  
School Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits



---

Carol Johnson, Ph.D.

The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin – Stout  
May, 2010

**The Graduate School  
University of Wisconsin-Stout  
Menomonie, WI**

**Author:** Sarah Dummer

**Title:** *Peer Mediation: What School Counselors Need to Know*

**Graduate Degree/Major:** MS School Counseling

**Research Adviser:** Carol Johnson, Ph.D.

**Month/Year:** May, 2010

**Number of Pages:** 32

**Style Manual Used:** American Psychological Association, 6<sup>th</sup> edition

**Abstract**

Teachers have used a variety of strategies to deal with conflict between students in the past. There are several types of peer mediation programs designed to reduce and manage conflict in schools. The type of plans implemented depends on the student's need, school climate, and willingness of all staff members to participate. Teachers need to be willing to participate in the training so they are able to aid students in mediation skills to resolve conflict more independently.

Peer mediation is a recent strategy developed for conflict resolution in schools based on the fact something needs to be done in order to make schools a safer place for students to learn. Teachers who participate in peer mediation programs have often witnessed the benefits students receive. Students are able to solve problems, develop better communication skills and gain confidence in working out differences in a school setting and at home. Students also benefit in a

number of ways which may include improved grades, positive problem solving skills, and better relationships among peers. Schools are also seeing a decrease in the number of students who are suspended when peer mediation is implemented. There are advantages and disadvantages to using peer mediation programs that will be discussed in this literature review.

**The Graduate School**  
**University of Wisconsin Stout**  
**Menomonie, WI**

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I offer my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr Carol Johnson, who has encouraged me throughout my thesis. I attribute my success to her feedback, interest, and effort. One simply could not wish for a friendlier or more supportive supervisor. I admire her humor and positive attitude on a day-to-day basis and I will strive to keep the same attitude throughout my life.

In addition, without the support and encouragement from my professors, Dr. Carol Johnson, Dr. Barb Flom and Dr. Denise Zirkle-Brouillard, I would not have learned all the skills I needed to become a successful school counselor. Their kind words and confidence in me helped to develop the skills I need to become an influential individual in the lives of children. I cannot forget my family who has supported me in my dream to becoming a school counselor. Their trust and confidence in my abilities to pursue my dream will never be forgotten.

Finally, I cannot forget all the classmates whom I have met throughout the past two years. If it were not for these friends I do not know how I would have survived these stressful times. Together we faced the challenges and came out knowing we would be better counselors. These individuals will be lifelong friends who I will be able to share lasting memories no one else can understand. Thank you all for making the past two year of my life the most happy and memorable time of my life, for without all of you I would not have found myself and grown into the person I am today!

## Table of Contents

	Page
.....	Page
Abstract .....	2
Chapter I: Introduction.....	6
Statement of the Problem.....	10
Purpose of the Study .....	10
Assumptions and Limitations .....	10
Definition of Terms.....	11
Chapter II: Literature Review .....	13
Introduction.....	13
Social Learning Theory.....	13
Peer Mediation .....	14
Goals of Mediation .....	17
Success of Mediation .....	20
Limitations of Mediation .....	22
Chapter III: Summary, Discussion and Recommendations .....	26
Summary .....	26
Discussion.....	27
Recommendations.....	28
References.....	30

## CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to inform school counselors about the important facts pertaining to peer mediation. Peer mediation is a student-focused form of conflict resolution seen in schools for about the past ten years (Shulman, 1996). Since peer mediation is a recent trend, research is rather limited on the subject leaving educators unsure of its benefits. Generally, research over the past ten years shows students can benefit from learning the skills taught in peer mediation.

Chapter one will provide an overview of the history and description of peer mediation. It will also include the purpose of the study, a statement of the problem, research objectives, and definition of terms. The chapter will conclude with the limitations and assumptions of the study.

Many of the conflict resolution programs have been implemented for a number of years in the business setting (Shulman, 1996) and only recently has peer mediation been used as conflict resolution in the school setting (Shulman, 1996; Lane, 1992). Individuals desiring to move away from the traditional court room setting developed ways to mediate various types of disputes by expanded efforts to use Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). This type of mediation used in courts has been adapted to a variety of areas since the 1960's (Trevaskis, 1994). In the 1970's attorneys and child advocates developed programs such as the Community Boards program from San Francisco or Resolving Conflict Creatively in New York City to help settle disputes (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). It was not until 1984 when the idea of mediation gained national attention. During this time the National Association for Mediation was formed which brought educators and court mediators together to design the best strategy for teaching mediation and conflict resolution (Trevaskis, 1994).

Conflict and violence have become problematic in schools today. The importance of researching these topics has become a pressing concern for educators (Trevaskis, 1994). Teachers and other school personnel are finding conflict among students is taking away academic teaching time from their already busy schedule. Conflict resolution strategies such as peer mediation have been implemented in schools and have been shown to reduce the number of conflicts occurring between students. Peer mediation teaches students how to communicate and resolve problems in a way where both students can influence the outcome. Unfortunately peer mediation programs can take a fair amount of time and effort to execute in a school setting which can make it challenging for educators to put these programs into practice.

Conflict is something everyone will see in their lifetime, so the importance of developing healthy and effective skills to come to a resolution are vital for students to learn. If conflicts are left unresolved they may turn into violence which can interfere with the quality of life for students while they are in school. Research has shown violence and disciplinary problems in schools may severely impact the students' learning environment. It has been found about one in five students carry weapons to school and almost 300,000 high school students are physically attacked every month (Trevaskis, 1994). These numbers indicate something needs to be done to make schools a safer place for students to learn.

In past years strategies have been implemented to decrease violence in schools across the United States. Costly safety procedures have included installing metal detectors, purchasing surveillance cameras or employing a full time police liaison. These procedures may reduce the amount of violence in schools; however, they do not address the main cause of the violence, unresolved conflict. Implementing these types of security options also tends to move the violence to somewhere in the community other than the school. The ideal way to prevent violence from

spreading to other areas in the community would include getting to the root of the issues by teaching useful ways to resolve the conflict (Trevaskis, 1994).

Since conflict resolution programs in schools is a recent idea there has been little research on its effects on students. However, subjective data from a number of schools who have implemented conflict resolution programs have documented peer mediators as being helpful in resolving disagreements. These peer mediators have also had an impact on reducing the number of suspensions (Shulman, 1996) and other discipline issues in schools (Lane, 1992).

As many educators are aware, classroom conflict is a problem often calling for an abundant amount of time and energy (Lane, McWhirter, 1992; Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, & Burnett, 1992). There are two options for implementing conflict resolution in schools. One option is where the teacher is the disciplinarian and the other option involves students having to resolve problems on their own with minimal teacher or adult interference. When conflict occurs a majority of the time teachers are the ones who intervene causing students to become unable to resolve conflicts themselves. Students learn to tattle on classmates to have the adult step in and resolve the issue. Current research is beginning to identify some positive outcomes when allowing students to resolve conflicts among themselves (Johnson et al., 1992).

Students who learn how to effectively resolve conflicts with peers can benefit in a number of ways. Many of these skills can migrate out of the classroom to aid students in resolving conflicts in a number of different areas. If students learn how to independently resolve conflict they may find fewer issues during recess, at lunch or in after school activities. Peer mediators learn how to listen, summarize the conflict, and think critically about the issue. In turn peer mediation may strengthen leadership, listening skills and the ability to have a calm two-way discussion. These skills may help mediators in the future as well as helping one understand



rights, choices, consequences and responsibilities. Just as the mediators themselves learn these skills, the disputants are also able to learn a number of things. For some this will be the first time they are able to see nonviolent ways to resolve a problem. When they can see conflict resolved in alternative ways they can transfer these skills to other disputes they may have at home with family members or in clubs or team sports (Trevaskis, 1994).

Peer mediation is becoming a prominent way for educators to allow students to resolve disagreements between themselves. Students are taught a number of ways to improve their listening and problem-solving skills to assist their peers in conflict resolution (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Peer mediation focuses on a “win-win” instead of a “win-lose” type of solution when disputing conflicts. The student mediator assists peers in finding a cohesive solution to the dispute by listening to both parties and helping them come to a fair conclusion (Peterson & Skiba, 2000; Humphries, 1999).

The training process and ongoing support for becoming a peer mediator requires time and effort from teachers, school counselors and students (Lane, 1992). Teachers who are willing to become a part of a peer mediation program will go through training which requires about eight hours of their time. Once completed teachers and school counselors will begin training the group of students who have been identified for peer mediation training which can take up to five half days of training (Lane, 1992). As one can see a peer mediation program requires a lot of volunteered time from educators who are already very busy with many other aspects of teaching students. The amount of time and effort it takes to put a peer mediation program into practice can often limit incorporating mediation programs for schools that are challenged to find educators who are willing to volunteer already limited time.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Conflict between students is a reoccurring problem in schools today. Many students do not have the right tools to address disagreements themselves which can lead to educators taking precious time to resolve conflicts. Peer mediation programs have shown positive results in a student's ability to work with one another to come up with fair resolutions to problems. Unfortunately peer mediation programs can take a considerable amount of time and effort to execute in a school setting which may prove difficult for educators to put these types of programs into action. Therefore, the problem becomes do peer mediation strategies work in a school setting where the benefits outweigh the investment in time and training to incorporate peer mediation?

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this review of literature is to address the following research questions:

1. How do teachers define conflict and what types of conflicts are educators facing in schools?
2. What is the extent of knowledge educators have about peer mediation programs?
3. Are educators willing to implement peer mediation to assist students in development of conflict resolution skills?

## **Assumptions**

In this study it is assumed students are faced with frequent conflicts with their peers and are in need of problem-solving skills that would benefit their social growth and development. It is also assumed teachers are already very busy and will have a difficult time implementing a peer mediation program without extra time and effort. It is assumed the literature came from reliable and accurate sources. Finally, it is assumed educators are interested in putting mediation skills

and teaching into practice to help students become well-rounded in developing their personal and social skills.

### **Limitations**

Peer mediation is a recently developed program being practiced more often in schools. While much of the research indicates positive outcomes for peer mediation, one limitation may be it has not researched enough to identify many potential negative outcomes. Further limitations include research mostly based on classrooms from the elementary and middle school levels and not much research was available for high school or college age students. Finally the information gathered in the literature review section is mostly limited to the teacher's perceptions of peer mediation because little research has been gathered from children. Also the researcher was limited in time and resources and may have overlooked some articles related to the topic. Literature was reviewed in the spring 2010.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are explained for understanding how they were used in this discussion on peer mediation.

*Conflict* is a problem or disagreement about a subject involving an individual or individuals who need to come to an agreement or resolution to the issue.

*Conflict resolution* is the act of coming to an agreed upon solution to a conflict or disagreement that has occurred between a pair or group of individuals.

*Mediation* is another form of conflict resolution where the individuals having the disagreement work with a neutral third party to come to a fair conclusion to their disagreement.

*Problem-solving* is a form of conflict resolution much like mediation where individuals brainstorm ways to identify the appropriate resolution.

*Peer mediators* are individuals who have received training in resolving conflicts and work with their peers to help them resolve disputes with one another.

## **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

The following narrative will give an overview of social learning theory and how it can be applied to conflict mediation programs in a school setting. Chapter two will also include a general overview of peer mediation, what the program entails, and how it works. Next a review of the goals of peer mediation programs and the benefits will be discussed and the chapter will conclude with highlights from effective peer mediation programs.

Students often lack experience in dealing with successful conflict resolution. The chance to learn how to deal with conflicts is often handled by nearby adults. Since this is the case, a considerable amount of time is spent by educators dealing with these conflicts. When students are given the appropriate skills to mediate conflict, positive changes can result (Prevention Education Associates, (n.d.)). It is important to look at different aspects of peer mediation to determine the best fit for managing conflicts within a school.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Students often value their relationships with peers more highly than any other friendships. When students are able to develop constructive ways to cope with the multifaceted demands of their social environment, they have a good chance of becoming emotionally healthy adults. When previously used ways of coping are no longer effective, students need new ways to successfully deal with the assortment of challenges they face (Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Landry, & Miller, 2000).

Conflicts and violence in schools often decrease when students are taught the proper ways to resolve conflicts (Fast, Fanelli & Salen, 2003). One researcher stated when individuals

identify appropriate behaviors they keep up these behaviors because they want to satisfy the group they identify with. Social learning theory looks at the interactions and behaviors between students to see how they can be explained (Khan & Cangemi, 2001). In a program developed using standards for peer mediation the ideas from social learning theory are reflected. Social learning theory proposes students will mimic what their peers do in social settings and also change their behavior based on these events to come up with new ways to behaving among their peers (Cantrell, et al., 2007).

Theorists in social learning believe recognition plays a big part in helping children learn things that are customary behaviors (Khan & Cangemi, 2001). Also when students see their peer behaving in appropriate ways they can also begin to adopt the same behaviors as their peers. Other theorists of social learning have stated ideas about how social learning is enforced by the contact individuals have with others and how they continue to imitate the behaviors seen. Students who see behaviors of groups they want to be in tend to take on the same behaviors so they are more likely to be welcomed into the group. This theory also states much of the learning occurring is because the individual observed and mimicked what they have seen. When these behaviors are reinforced the individual then imitates the behavior more often (Khan & Cangemi, 2001). This theory can help to explain how conflict management programs can be implemented and help to change the behavior of students when they come into contact with conflicts of their own.

### **Peer Mediation**

Over the years disorderly, destructive, and violent behavior has increased in schools, so the implementation of programs critical of ensuring students safety have also increased. Teachers often do not have a large number of options available to deal with these types of behavior. Thus,

many outcomes include suspension or placement in an alternative school decrease the opportunity for teaching appropriate behaviors students will be able to use later in life (Daunic, et.al, 2000).

Peer mediation is a strategy teaching students to mediate conflicts with their peers in a negotiation form of resolution (Peterson & Skiba, 2000; Deutsch, 1994). It also gives students a chance to take responsibility for their actions (Schrumpf, Crawford, & Usadel, 1991). Teachers can also benefit by having more instructional time due to the fact they are dealing with a smaller number on conflicts (Benson & Benson, 1993).

Peer mediation programs can be set up and implemented in different ways in the school. One approach is a school-wide program where groups of students from various grade levels receive training. Those who complete the training then act as peer mediators throughout the year during designated times with little adult interference. A second approach is a classroom model where students from each class are given training and mediate within their classroom during the year. These students often mediate in same grade classrooms and also for students who are in grades below them. Finally, a whole class approach where every student in the school receives training in peer mediation (Davies, 2001).

Conflict resolution between peers is perceived as a normal and constructive way to promote personal growth and social change in students (Shulman, 1996). Students need to learn how to listen and communicate effectively with others. Knowing about personal space and reading body language also contribute to successful mediation. Awareness of cultural diversity may have an impact on how individuals communicate and interact with one another (Girard & Koch, 1996). In mediation sessions teaching students how to have positive social skills, four

basic areas are typically taught including modeling, role playing, feedback on their performance and continuing training (Keller & Tapasak, 2004).

In many peer mediation programs, students are encouraged to develop a “win-win” outcome where both individuals agree instead of coming to a “win-lose” outcome where only one student benefits in the end (Shulman, 1996). One study completed in a middle school found, 83% of students who were trained in peer mediation were able to suggest a “win-win” solution to the problem, where as 86% of students who were not trained came up with a “win-lose” solution (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Typical conflicts solved by peer mediators includes verbal harassment, name-calling, spreading rumors, threats of harm, physical altercations including pushing or hitting (Daunic, et.al, 2000; Davies, 2001; Cohen 2002).

Peer mediating sessions can be formal or informal and students can also refer themselves or be referred by someone else in the school. Formal mediation consists of a peer mediator who meets during a specific time with the individuals involved in the conflict. Informal mediation can occur in the hall, cafeteria or outside when a conflict occurs and is handled by peer mediators on the spot. One important factor to remember is individuals have to voluntarily participate in the mediation and receive age-appropriate training (Davies, 2001; Landsberger, 2002).

Students who are chosen or elected to become peer mediators undergo several hours of training and participate in role-playing simulations before they are asked to mediate disagreements between their peers (Humphries, 1999). During training student mediators will learn various skills in negotiation and conflict resolution (Cantrell, Parks-Savage & Rehfluss, 2007). When the students are mediating situations, they assist their peers in the communication and problem-solving stage of the disputes in order to reach a resolution accepted by both individuals. The peer mediator provides the opportunity for both of the students to talk out their



feelings about the situation uninterrupted so students are able to hear the other's side of the story (Shulman, 1996).

### **Goals of Peer Mediation**

The school climate is one area which has been found to be affected by peer mediation, as seen by both teachers and students in research by Skiba and Peterson (2000). Teachers working in an unhealthy school climate stated they felt a lack of respect for adult authority among its students. Students further indicated they felt as though they have not had the chance to build a strong bond with teachers in the school. When students feel as though they are able to talk to their teachers about problems other than academics, this may change the climate of the school.

In some schools students also feel unsafe or that disciplinary decisions are carried out unfairly, which may discourage them from using peer mediation as an option to resolve conflict. Overcrowding in schools may also contribute to the amount of stress and tension within the school. These factors need to be taken into account when a program such as peer mediation is being considered (Theberge & Karan, 2004).

When individuals are unable to communicate in a clear manner or put themselves in another's shoes it can cause conflicts (McFarland, 1992). When a disagreement occurs each person is likely to identify their own opinion on the topic as the correct one and the other person should also agree with the way they believe.

Conflict can progress through a series of stages based on the type of conflict. Stage one signifies one individual has more authority or is deemed more right in the discussion as opposed to the other side. With further discussion and mediation it is hoped both sides will reach the point where both individuals feel the other one understands their perspective and is willing to concede or meet half-way for a mutual compromise. The final stage is when the individuals agree on a

common conclusion to the conflict which is generally satisfactory to all parties involved. Being able to recognize these different stages of conflict is the first step in becoming able to positively resolve conflicts (McFarland, 1992).

The most common types of conflicts either occur between students and students or between students and teachers. By learning how to mediate the conflict, students may then be able to use their mediation skills without having to turn to other adults for resolution help (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley & Burnett, 1992). The information gathered from recent research stresses a need to teach students how to be responsible, make good decisions, practice good listening skills, develop conflict resolution tactics, and know how to cooperate with one another (Shulman, 1996).

One goal of peer mediation is to come to a nonviolent “win-win” instead of a “win-lose” resolution to the conflict presented (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Important skills students need to learn when they are taught to be peer mediators is positive negotiation skills, mediation of the conflict and ways to resolve the conflict fairly (Johnson, et al., 1992). Another specific goal many peer mediation programs include is helping students understand conflict, increase knowledge on conflict mediation and resolution (Cantrell, et al. 2007). When students know how to properly manage conflicts they then have an advantage over students who do not (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley & Burnett, 1992), and these skills may prove helpful as the student grows up and faces the challenges of the adult world of relationships and work (Cantrell, et al., 2007).

Teaching individuals how to properly negotiate and resolve problems gives students’ confidence to start regulating their own behavior in positive ways (Johnson, et al., 1992). The student mediator is taught not to judge or defend only one side of the situation, rather mediators are to encourage communication between individuals to help promote responsible behavior (Shulman, 1996). Students, who are taught how to resolve conflicts with their peers, are given

the chance to keep their behavior in check, decide what is appropriate for the circumstances and change their behavior to reach a common resolution (Johnson, Johnson, et al., 1992). A peer mediation program can be used by itself in schools to resolve conflicts and educators are encouraged to use the peer mediation program along with other violence prevention programs to obtain the best results (Peterson & Skiba, 2000).

### **Benefits for Students and Teachers**

The students who are taught to mediate conflicts are able to apply communication, listening, group problem-solving and resolutions to the conflicts they face (McWhirter, 1992; Davies, 2001). Peer mediators themselves benefit in a number of ways from the skills they learn including academic improvement, leadership skills, increased self-esteem and the ability to resolve problems effectively (Humphries, 1999). Peer mediation programs allow students to create positive relationships with their peers which can boost their social skills, problem solving abilities, and social development as they continue to grow and face new challenges (Cantrell, et al., 2007). Students who are peer mediators generally have a stronger ability to problem-solve in effective ways, have better communication skills, and also have a more positive view of themselves (Humphries, 1999). Parents of students who have been taught peer mediation in school have also seen an improvement in the ways conflicts are resolved at home (Shulman, 1996).

The peer mediator is taught to resolve conflicts in a constructive way and not to judge their peers or force harmony upon the conflict. Student mediators may develop a better outlook on the positive ways to help their friends while increasing their self-esteem and respect by classmates. Peer mediators who have shown retention of these skills over a period of time

become more comfortable resolving conflict based on strategies learned in the program (Peterson & Skiba, 2000).

One benefit for teachers is they often find they can have more time for teaching and less time devoted to discipline as a result of peer mediation programs reduce the number of events where adult discipline support is needed (McWhirter, 1992). The amount of time spent training and practicing with students is off-set by reduced time spent handling the conflicts could be settled by students alone. Students who come in contact with the peer mediators can also benefit in a number of ways from observing their behavior (Humphries, 1999). When students are able to learn how to control their behavior they later choose the correct way to behave and are often able to follow through with their decisions to work cooperatively with others (Johnson, et al., 1992).

### **The Success of Peer Mediation**

Peer mediation programs have been adopted throughout the country at a faster pace than researchers can study the benefits. Currently 8,500 schools use peer mediation programs to resolve conflicts in their schools according to the National Institute for Dispute Resolution (n.d.). The NIDR also states 85% of the students who have received peer mediation training will use these skills when faced with conflicts (American News Service, 1999). Many of the preliminary results indicate peer mediation was a promising approach to creating a good school climate (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

In prior studies the most common conflicts reported were put-downs, playground disputes, and students taking things from one another, physical fights, and difficulties taking turns (Johnson, et al., 1992). Data from one middle schools showed students who were taught peer mediation resolved issues in a “win-win” conclusion 83% of the time while student who

have not had mediation training resolved issues in a “win-lose” outcome about 86% of the time (Peterson & Skiba, 2000).

Additional studies monitored suspension rates taken before and after the implementation of a peer mediation program and found reductions in student suspension rates ranging from 25-75%. In a three year study at an elementary school, researchers found significant rates of reduction in the number of suspensions after implementing peer mediation programs (Cantrell, et al., 2007; Shulman, 1996). Other schools have reported numbers of student suspensions dropped by half after only a year of implementing peer mediation programs. Other research by Shulman (1996) highlighted improved cooperation in class after students were introduced to a peer mediation program.

Recent research on school violence has emphasized the need for whole school approaches for conflict prevention (Keller & Tapasak, 2004). Many schools are now requiring courses or workshops teaching students effective ways to resolve conflict, as without this training many students may never learn positive ways to dealing with conflict as they aren't always learning positive ways to resolve conflict at home (Johnson, et al., 1992).

Some students are choosing to opt out of peer mediation for a variety of reasons. First, students may have distrust in the mediation process itself. Some students fear they will be laughed at, sides will be taken, or they may get in trouble if they cannot resolve the issue themselves. Students may also prefer to deal with the conflicts on their own as they may be concerned about what others will think of them. Another problem is the difficulty for kids to maintain confidentiality when resolving conflict. Students distrust not only the mediator but also others involved in the mediation. Students often have different ideas about how conflict should be handled. Some students have chosen to deal with conflict is in a passive or avoiding it all

together by just not buying into the process. Still other students may choose to resolve their problems by going to their friends to talk about it and brainstorm options workable for them without using a peer mediator. Finally, students may also choose to act aggressively toward others in an attempt to deal with the problem. The school climate, amount of training provided and practiced along with school rules may impact the attitudes and willingness of students to use peer mediation or not. One of these dilemmas includes a power imbalance among the students involved as it can be intimidating for students to request a mediator when they feel a lack of control over the situation. Also students who are chronically behaving badly may feel as though they may be placed in the “bad-kid” category (Theberge & Karan, 2004).

### **Limitations of Mediation**

Many schools are starting to realize the importance of equipping students with interpersonal skills to help develop communication and problem-solving abilities (Keller & Tapasak, 2004). The support from administration and staff is the critical to the success in a comprehensive peer mediation program (Davies, 2001, Theberge & Karan, 2004). Since there is such a strong need for conflict resolution programs in schools there is a lot of pressure placed on school administrators to improve the school climate. If peer mediation is seen as a valuable form of conflict resolution it may be in the best interest of all to get others individuals in the school involved to ensure mediation programs are effective. Along with school administrators, counselors and educators, it is important to form a strong support group of parents who could also be a key component in the program success. When educators are not on board or are not fully supportive of the program the likelihood of the program’s effectiveness may weaken.

Keeping everyone informed about the initial phases and later progress of the program can be a wonderful way to get positive public attention and get more people onboard (Daunic, et.al.

2000). Students may also become discouraged from using peer mediation because they do not understand how it works or what it does (Theberge & Karan, 2004).

A variety of strategies can be used to show the benefits the program. Ideas such as reminders in the daily announcements, posters throughout the school and community, reminder and support emails to teachers, specially designed t-shirts worn by mediators, flyers containing beneficial data for community members and parents, and other recognition of the program contributions to the school should be used to be informative and inclusive. (Daunic et.al, 2000).

Another important factor to be considered is the consistency of the programs use throughout the school. For the program to be the most beneficial, classroom lessons should be incorporated to further discuss ideas of conflict resolution. Students cannot be expected to become experts in the area of mediation after just one training session. Keeping the program age-appropriate and reinforcing the lessons in a consistent manner and while monitoring the progress may keep everyone on the same page. Also individuals involved in the mediation process should ask for feedback from all participants to gain their opinions about the effectiveness of the mediation. This information can be used to alter aspects of the program, constituents feel are working or less effective in the process (Daunic, et.al, 2000).

Choosing students to be mediators is another area of importance in determining the success of the peer mediation program. Suggestions have been made to include students based on a number of different variables including, age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, and special education placement (Daunic, et.al, 2000; Landsberger, 2002). All students should feel a comfort level and connection with the mediators based on their culture, age, abilities, interests and gender. Students can be recommended through self-referral or by classmates, parents, teachers, and counselors. It is important to remember parental support is necessary (Davies, 2001).

Using a diverse population as a candidate pool for student mediators can be helpful in a number of ways. First, students from a diverse group may have an easier time understanding a wide variety of issues and second, the training may have a positive impact on students by giving them stronger leadership skills (Daunic, 2000).

Students who were trained in the mediation process often have suggested the scenarios used in the training sessions should be more realistic so students are able to practice situations they would be likely to encounter (Humphries, 1999). Many students who had difficulties mediating for their friends expressed worry they may lose the friendship or had fear of being picked on by other students who were not mediators. It is not surprising students find it difficult to mediate between their friends because at this stage in their lives students desire a need to be accepted by their peers. Peer mediators have discussed other reasons why they do not enjoy mediating disagreements including missing recess, working through the lunch period, and not always being able to help (Humphries, 1999).

In order for the mediation program to be effective, peer mediators need to be highly trained, have adults available for support and consultation, and continue to be monitored to ensure they are providing correct services to their peers (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). It is important the program is also monitored to address any problems that may arise. It is also vital the individuals in charge of the program keep track of the mediators used, their effectiveness and how others view the process as a way to create a strong program based on feedback from the participants. Thus, it may be necessary for mediators to have regular meetings to keep students excited about the program and provide students with refresher training as needed (Skiba & Peterson, 2000).



Previous researchers have suggested a time frame of two to five years of mediation program use to obtain meaningful data. These researchers believe it is important to give teachers at least two years to become comfortable with teaching peer mediation and about five years of training students in the process to ensure the program is accepted (Cantrell, et al., 2007).

Another reason for varying results in peer mediation could be accounted for by the support of administrators, students being unwilling to participate and teacher uncertainty due to their feelings about how conflicts should be resolved in their classroom (Cantrell, et al., 2007). It is suggested encouraging individuals to set up a schedule so mediations take place in a timely manner. Open periods and during lunch time are the suggested times mediations should take place so students are not missing classes (Daunic, 2000). Schools will need to evaluate programs, select what is appropriate to their needs and implement them gradually for best results.

### **Chapter III: Summary and Recommendations**

#### **Summary**

This review of literature identified the need for options to resolve student conflict in a peaceful and student centered process. Conflict between students can take a lot of time away from teachers who are already busy in the classroom. Programs designed to manage conflict are designed to teach students how to resolve conflicts on their own with minimal adult interference. Peer mediation includes a variety of program options reducing the amount of time teachers need to sacrifice in order to resolve conflicts between students.

Peer mediation training does require a considerable amount of time and energy to initially set up in a school. This may discourage teachers from wanting to take the time to participate in the training; however, teachers also realize peer mediation can be used to teach students how to develop and use problem solving skills to resolve conflicts and the end result may be less time spent on adult and student conflict resolution.

Conflict among students is a commonly occurring problem in many schools throughout the United States. Teachers and school counselors realize the importance of developing student's academic as well as social skills. When peer mediation programs are adopted, schools report student learning may improve and social skills are further developed. Mediation programs teach students positive ways to resolve conflict on their own without having to contact parents or educators to step in and resolve the problems for the children. Peer mediation is just one way students are empowered to resolve conflicts as they work together to come to a solution satisfying both individuals. Schools need the support of parents, students, counselors and teachers to make it work.

## Discussion

Teachers witness conflict between students in the forms of physical aggression, theft, arguments, bullying, relationship conflicts and sharing-related issues. Just as social learning theory can be used to describe the changes seen in students who have used peer mediation successfully, it can also be used to describe some of the reasons bullying occurs. Students who see bullying and other forms of conflict in schools often pick up the habits they learned from watching their peers so they are able to become a part of the group with whom they want to associate. Social learning theory has supported the idea of conflict resolution indicating students can pick up the bad habits as easily as poor students, they can also learn by watching the appropriate ways to resolve issues from students who were trained.

Teachers have used a variety of different strategies to deal with conflict between students in the past. There are several strategies for reducing and managing conflict in schools. The type of plans implemented depends on the schools need, school climate and willingness of all staff members to participate. Teachers need to be willing to participate in the training required so they are able to aid students in mediation skills to resolve conflict more independently.

Peer mediation is a recent strategy developed for conflict resolution in schools based on the fact something needs to be done in order to make schools a safer place for students to learn. Teachers who participate in peer mediation programs have often witnessed the benefits students receive. Students are able to solve problems, develop better communication skills and gain confidence in working out differences in a school setting and at home. Students also benefit in a number of ways which may include improved grades, positive problem solving skills, and better relationships among peers. Schools are also seeing a decrease in the number of students who are suspended when peer mediation is implemented.

The importance of developing good social skills is also part of a skill set children will need when they become young adults. When students are taught positive conflict management they are able to take those skills as they grow and come into contact with other types of conflicts possibly in athletics, clubs and on the job. School personnel have realized when they work together to adopt programs such as peer mediation the climate of the school can change drastically giving teachers more time to help students learn.

It is important for school counselors and teachers to work on new ways to make schools a safe and enjoyable place for students to learn. It is also important for school personnel to understand the different types of conflict they are seeing so we are able to promote new ways for students to work with one another and develop positive social skills they will use for the rest of their lives.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the summary and discussion of this study, the following recommendations for additional research are suggested. Schools should consider including training for peer mediation on teacher in-service days. Training could be facilitated through existing professional development days with follow-up sessions during team planning time or scheduled as needed throughout the year. After initial planning for the training, research could be conducted throughout the school year to determine if behavior and discipline issues decline.

Looking at diversity and cultural issues, further research is recommended to determine if there is a program best suited the inclusion of many populations based on their conflict resolution styles. Comparing gender differences in solving problems and conflict would also be another researchable topic. Do girls and boys use communication styles that differ enough to warrant additional training and research specific to either gender?

Regardless of research it is imperative, future school personnel investigate more online and cyber related conflicts and seek ways to mediate conflict going on through internet, cell phone and social networking pages. It appears to some degree when the bullying and conflicts are not dealt with at school, they can carry over into the home and community and result in assaults, threats and improper conduct needing to be addressed. Additional research in this area might support the need to keep all children safe in their schools, homes and communities.

## References

- American News Service. (1999). *Juvenile peer mediation expands beyond schools*. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from: <http://www.mediate.com/pfriendly.cfm?id=175>
- Benson, A. J., & Benson, J. M. (1993). Peer mediation: Conflict resolution in schools. *Journal of School Psychology, 31*, 427-430.
- Cantrell, R., Parks-Savage, A., & Rehfuss, M. (2007). Reducing levels of elementary school violence with peer mediation. *Professional School Counseling, 10*(5), 475-481.
- Daunic, A. P., Smith, S. W., Robinson, T. R., Landry, K. L., & Miller, M. D. (2000). School- wide conflict resolution and peer mediation programs: Experiences in three middle schools. *Intervention in Schools & Clinic 36*(2), 94-101.
- Davies, L. (2001). *Solutions through peer mediation*. Retrieved February 18, 2010, from: <http://www.kellybear.com/TeacherArticles/TeacherTip13.html>
- Deutsch, M. (1994). Constructive conflict resolution: Principles, training, and research. *Journal of Social Issues, 50*, 13-32.
- Fast, J., Fanelli, F., & Salen, L. (2003). How becoming mediators affects aggressive students. *National Association of Social Workers, 25*(3), 161-170.
- Humphries, T. L. (1999). Improving peer mediation programs: Student experiences and suggestions. *Professional School Counseling, 3*(1), 13-21.
- Johnson D., & Johnson R. (1992, September). Teaching students to be peer mediators. *Educational Leadership* [serial online], *50*(1),10. (Available from: Professional Development Collection, Ipswich, MA).

- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (1996). Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in elementary and secondary schools: A review of research. *Review of Educational Research, 66*(4), 459-506.
- Khan K., & Cangemi, (1997, Fall). Social learning theory: The role of imitation in learning socially desirable behavior. *Education* [serial online], *100*(1),41. (Available from: Professional Development Collection, Ipswich, MA).
- Landsberger, J. (1996). *Peer mediation*. Retrieved March 24, 2010 from:  
<http://www.studygs.net/peermed.htm>
- Lane, P. S., & McWhirter, J. J. (1992). A peer mediation model: Conflict resolution for elementary and middle school children. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling, 27*(1), 15-24.
- McFarland, W. P. (1992). Counselors teaching peaceful conflict resolution. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 72*, 18-21.
- Peterson, R. L., & Skiba, R. (2000). Creating school climates that prevent school violence. *Preventing School Failure, 44*(3), 122-130.
- Poland, S. (2004). School crisis teams. In J. C. Conoley & A. P. Goldstein (Eds.), *School violence intervention* (pp. 131-163). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Prevention Education Association. (n.d.). *Positive attitudes coming together* (PACT). Retrieved February 18, 2010, from: [www.educating.org/peer\\_mediation.htm](http://www.educating.org/peer_mediation.htm)
- Schrumpf, F., Crawford, D., & Usadel, H. C. (1991). Peer mediation: *Conflict resolution in the schools*. Champaign, IL: Research Press
- Shulman, H. A. (1996). Using developmental principals in violence prevention. *Elementary School Guidance & Counseling, 30*(3), 170-180.

- Skiba, R., & Peterson, R. (2000). *Creating a positive climate peer mediation*. Safe & responsive schools fact sheet. Retrieved March 18, 2010, from:  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/climate.html>
- Theberge, S. K., & Karan, O. C. (2004). Six factors inhibiting the use of peer mediation in a junior high school. *Professional School Counseling*, 7(4), 283-290.
- Trevaskis, D., K. (1994). *Mediation in schools*. ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education. Retrieved March 18,2010, from: [www.ericdigests.org/1995-2/mediation.htm](http://www.ericdigests.org/1995-2/mediation.htm)