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Conflict resolution in elementary school

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by
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ABSTRACT

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN
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The purpose of this study was to investigate and assess the effectiveness of conflict

resolution training on students' ability to recall the steps of conflict resolution and to use

conflict resolution strategies to resolve conflicts peacefully. Thirty-five third grade

students from a middle class rural elementary school participated in the study. The

experimental group (N = 17) received six weeks of conflict resolution training, and the

control group (N = 18) received no intervention. All participants were assessed on recall

of the six steps of conflict resolution and on the application of conflict strategies in

response to a conflict scenario during a pre and posttest. A two-way analysis of variance

was conducted and indicated that conflict resolution training is effective in teaching

students to recall the steps of conflict resolution $F = 163.984, p \leq .000$ df (1,33) and is

effective in teaching students strategies to resolve conflicts peacefully $F = 8.791, p \leq .006$

df (1,33). The group who received training recalled significantly more steps and utilized

more peaceful conflict strategies than the control group $F = 18.263, p \leq 000$, df (1,33).

Implications for the effectiveness in teaching conflict resolution in elementary school are

discussed.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Need

A few years ago two students entered Columbine High School and killed a teacher, and thirteen fellow students. Later they committed suicide after injuring an additional twenty-three students. Columbine students later admitted that the two perpetrators had been severely, teased, mocked, humiliated, and were routinely excluded by the popular group. Columbine students did not settle their conflict with either aggressor constructively (Johnson, & Johnson, 2005). Conflicts are constructively resolved when all involved are satisfied with the resolution and the relationship between the involved people has improved, and the ability to resolve conflicts in the future has been improved. It is clear that the students at Columbine High School had never learned to manage conflicts in a positive way (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

Recent extremely violent events in schools have prompted schools to initiate programs aimed at reducing school violence and conflict between students. Programs usually focus on reducing aggressive and disruptive behaviors such as fighting, and verbal conflicts. Even when these behaviors are not overtly violent they disrupt the learning environment and create interpersonal problems for students (Wilson & Lipsey, 2003). Considerable instructional, administrative, and learning efforts are interrupted, because students and teachers are frequently engaged in conflicts that are managed poorly (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Schools should attempt to minimize aggressive type behaviors like fighting, name-calling, bullying and intimidation that can make the school

environment negative and can lead to more serious types of violence. Most of these behaviors begin with some type of conflict that is not resolved (Wilson & Lipsey, 2003).

Every child has the right to go to a safe school where students are free from undue psychological stress and physical harm. It is difficult for students to acquire academic and social competencies when they do not feel safe in school (Nelson, Martella, & Marchand, 2002). In response to the need for violence prevention, school administrators engage in three approaches to violence prevention (a) security (b) punishment and (c) conflict resolution. Security approaches keep violence down, and punishment deters violence, but neither approach solves the problem. However, conflict resolution programs provide alternatives to violence and teach students other ways of behaving and interacting (Breunlin, Cimmarusi, Bryant-Edwards, & Hetherton, 2002). There is substantial evidence that violent behavior is learned and can be prevented through teaching alternate behaviors (Breunlin et. al. 2002). Constructive management of conflict can increase the productivity in the classroom, however teachers receive little training on how to teach students these strategies (Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

The goal of conflict resolution is to find a solution to a problem where both parties get what they want and avoid conflict in the process. Violence occurs when one party uses violence to get his or her way at the expense of the other party, and the loser reacts to defeat by acting out (Breunlin et al. 2002). Conflict resolution techniques encourage people to analyze problems critically and learn nonviolent methods of dealing with conflict. Teachers can teach conflict resolution training in a variety of school settings (Williamson, Warner, Sanders, & Knepper, 1999). If students have learned

conflict resolution techniques they may be able to resolve their differences and

disagreements without resorting to violence or aggression (Chetkow-Yanoov,1996).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate and assess the effectiveness of

conflict resolution training on students' ability to apply conflict resolution strategies and

on the students' ability to recall the six steps of conflict resolution.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that after participating in conflict resolution training, students

would have increased knowledge of the steps of conflict resolution as indicated by a pre-

test and post-test of knowledge. It was also hypothesized that after participating in

conflict resolution training students would resolve conflicts in more peaceful ways and

with less aggression than prior to training. This would be indicated by a pretest and

posttest of conflict resolution style where students respond to a realistic conflict scenario.

Theory/Background

Conflict management is a philosophy and a set of skills that assist individuals and

groups in better understanding and dealing with conflict as it arises in all aspects of their

lives (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). According to Morton Deutsch (1989), a conflict occurs

whenever incompatible activities occur. An action that is incompatible with another

action prevents, obstructs, interferes, injures or in some way makes the latter less likely

or less effective. Conflict is an inevitable part of life, and how it is managed can enhance

or disrupt cooperation and group productivity (Deutsch, 2003). Morton Deutsch's law of

social relations states that there are two types of group interaction styles (a) cooperation

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and (b) competition. Cooperation induces openness, helpfulness, trust, friendliness and an orientation toward mutual power. Competition on the other hand, induces coercion, deception, threat, hostility, and suspicion and induces issues of conflict (Deutsch 2003). Building on Deutsch's research, Johnson and Johnson (2006) have detailed a large number of studies that indicate that a cooperative process leads to greater productivity, more favorable interpersonal and intergroup relations, and more constructive resolution of conflict. Cooperative relations are also referred to as social interdependence (Deutsch, 2003). In contrast, competition stimulates the view that the solution of a conflict can only be imposed by one side on the other which leads to threats, violence and coercion. Each competitor seeks superiority and power, which creates a power struggle and escalates the conflict. In other words, someone must win, and someone must lose (Deutsch, 2003).

Johnson and Johnson's (1998) social interdependence theory expands on Morton Deutsch's theory. Johnson and Johnson apply social interdependence theory directly to education. Social interdependence occurs when individuals share common goals and each individual's outcomes are affected by the actions of others (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). They state that whether a conflict is resolved constructively or destructively is determined by whether participants have learned the procedures for constructively managing conflicts. Conflicts are constructively resolved when all the individuals involved are satisfied with the resolution, the relationship among the individuals has improved, and the individual's ability to resolve conflicts with each other has improved, (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

Schools and classrooms become conflict negative organizations when conflicts are ignored, suppressed, denied, and avoided. Johnson and Johnson (2005) further state that conflicts are inevitable, healthy and valuable. Conflicts are potentially constructive and should be encouraged. Students can be taught to negotiate constructive resolutions. Resolution of conflict requires people to value the long-term relationship with another as more important than the result of any short-term conflict.

According to Johnson and Johnson (2005), there are two types of social contexts in which conflicts occur in schools (a) competitive and (b) cooperative. Competitive contexts result in destructive outcomes of conflict, because it results in a win-lose situation where someone must win and someone must lose. Cooperative contexts result in positive or constructive outcomes, because there is joint benefit to both parties. This is known as a win-win situation (Johnson & Johnson 2005). Johnson and Johnson state further that conflicts cannot be managed constructively in a competitive or individualistic learning environment and that a cooperative context is necessary. Cooperation results in greater effort, improved interpersonal relations, and reduced risk of depression and anxiety (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

The two types of conflict resolution programs in school districts are the (a) cadre approach and the (b) total school or total classroom approach. The cadre approach involves training a small group of students to be peer mediators who help fellow students resolve conflicts. The total school/classroom approach involves training all students to use conflict resolution strategies. Conflict resolution training teaches self-regulation, responsibility, empowerment, and critical thinking skills.

According to Johnson and Johnson (2005), students have a negativity bias concerning conflicts. Students view conflict as negative and confuse conflict with anger, fighting, quarreling and overestimate the frequency in which it occurs. Students view violence as a necessary component of conflict resolution. Johnson and Johnson (2005) believe that students must learn that conflict is inevitable and can be resolved in a positive way. Johnson and Johnson's integrative negotiation theory incorporates six steps to resolving conflicts: (a) state wants (b) express feelings (c) state reasons underlying wants and feelings (d) communicate understanding of others (e) generate three solutions and (f) reach agreement on a mutually beneficial solution. All students should be taught how to negotiate in order to resolve conflicts in a constructive way that is beneficial to all parties involved (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

Definition of Terms

1. Cadre Approach-Training a small number of students to be peer mediators who help schoolmates resolve conflicts more constructively.

2. Competitive Learning-Students working against each other to achieve a goal that only one or a few can attain.

3. Conflict-An activity that prevents, blocks, or interferes with another activity.

4. Cooperative Learning-Students working together to accomplish shared goals.

5. Individualistic Learning-Students work by themselves to accomplish learning goals.

6. Interdependence-When group members are linked in a way that one cannot succeed unless the other members succeed, and they all must coordinate their efforts to complete a task.

7. Total School/Classroom Approach-Training all students to use conflict resolution techniques to resolve conflicts constructively.

8. Win-Lose Negotiations-When each negotiator has as his or her goal making an agreement more favorable to oneself than to the other negotiator.

9. Win-Win Negotiations-When each negotiator has as his or her goal making an agreement that is mutually beneficial to both parties.

Assumptions

In this investigation it was assumed that all students participated in the training sessions, and all students put forth adequate effort and concern on both the pre-test and post-test assessments. It was also assumed that all assessments were scored equitably. It was further assumed that the instruments accurately assess knowledge of the steps of conflict resolution and the ability to resolve conflicts. It was assumed that students answered honestly and accurately all questions. It was also assumed that both the pre-tests and post-tests were administered in a uniform way.

Limitations

This investigation had several limitations. The population used was limited to middle class third grade students from a rural school district, and they were all regular education students. The sample size was small and not racially diverse. The post-test occurred close in time to the last training session and may not indicate a long-term gain in

skills and knowledge. Additionally, the teacher's inexperience administering conflict resolution training may be a limitation, because it was her first time training students to use conflict resolution skills. In addition, the experimental group and the control group were each taught by different teachers. Each teacher also administered the assessments to the respective group and may have differed in some way.

Summary

Chapter II includes a review of the research related to conflict resolution and peer mediation training. It includes studies of kindergarten through high school students and both cadre and total school approaches to training. Chapter III includes the description of the design of the experiment. Chapter IV provides a review of the results and the outcomes of the investigation. Chapter V includes conclusions that could be inferred from the experiment and a discussion on further future research considerations. This includes how the investigation could be conducted in order to allow for greater generalizability to the population.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The research reviewed below is discussed from the most general to the most specific as related to the current study. General research includes a review of studies that provide an overview of conflict resolution programs initiated in schools. It includes research that involves a systemic approach and comprehensive large-scale studies involving whole districts and multiple schools. The more specific research includes studies conducted on schools utilizing a whole school or whole classroom approach that incorporates all students. Further review will include studies where conflict resolution training was integrated into the curriculum. Finally, studies involving cadre peer mediation programs will be reviewed.

Many peer mediation and conflict resolution programs have been instituted all over the United States, however most programs have only been evaluated using anecdotal evidence. There is an ongoing need to effectively assess and evaluate the programs used to determine how effective they are (Powell, Muir-McClain, Halasyamani, 1995). There are several basic types of conflict resolution programs taking place in our schools. There are two main types of conflict resolution programs in place in schools. The first type is known as the whole school or whole class approach. In this approach all students receive conflict resolution training and all students learn to negotiate and solve problems. The second approach is the peer mediation or cadre approach where only a small group of students is trained to mediate conflicts with peers (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). This review will discuss studies of both types of programs.

Systemic Approach and Comprehensive Large Scale Studies

According to the Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Teachers College of Columbia University (2005), schools need to take a systemic approach to preventing school violence. Schools must address school violence on multiple levels, such as at the levels of the discipline systems, by instituting conflict resolution training to staff and students, by integrating conflict resolution training into the curriculum, and by working with the community. The Institute states further that by promoting conflict resolution training as part of a comprehensive program on nonviolence students will develop the skills to help them resolve problems within families, communities and nations in the future.

Farrell, Meyer, and White (2001) evaluated a school-based violence prevention program called Responding in Peaceful and Positive ways (RIPP). The goal of this program was to reduce violence in sixth grade classes of urban youths. The subjects were from three middle schools in Richmond, Virginia who were assigned randomly to an experimental or control group. Students were exposed to curriculum that enhances knowledge, attitudes, and skills that promote nonviolence and problem-solving skills for preventing violence. The results indicated that the training resulted in reduced discipline referrals and reduced suspensions overall (Farrell et al. 2001).

Garibaldi, Blanchard, & Brooks (1996) conducted an outcome evaluation of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program in four New Orleans Schools to determine the program's impact on teachers' management skills and their use of suspension referrals. It was hypothesized that teachers with good classroom management skills and the ability to implement conflict resolution practices would be less likely to make large discipline

referrals. After interviewing teachers and principals 57% indicated that as a result of the conflict training they were able to resolve problems they could not resolve or identify before the training (Garibaldi et al, 1996). It could be concluded that the staff benefits from conflict resolution training too. The staff will need to have conflict resolution training to successfully and fully implement any comprehensive type program.

Large Scale Studies

Tschannen-Moran (2001) states that there is evidence that conflict resolution training can be effective on individual students, but school-wide effects have not been explored as widely. This study explores the impact of conflict resolution training on 50 high schools in Ohio that implemented conflict resolution programs. The study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods of investigation. Three major types of data were collected: document analysis, interview data, and faculty surveys. The school implemented curriculum infusion, peer mediation and held special events to promote conflict resolution. The findings include: safer school environment, less physical fighting, reduced staff time resolving conflicts, increase in students use of negotiation skills. Additionally, out of the 50 schools, 48 of them still had programs in place three years later (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). This study demonstrates the value of conflict management training and its effectiveness in reducing school violence and gives merit to the positive effects on the school as a whole.

The Tennessee Education Association and the Appalachia Educational Laboratory Study Group on Conflict Resolution (1993) was formed to examine the issue of conflict resolution and to find existing materials and methods to reduce classroom conflict and disruption in Tennessee schools. They examined many different curriculums

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and conducted case studies on various schools. The study group gathered information using surveys from staff and telephone interviews, and it was concluded that conflict resolution training and peer mediation both are effective ways to reduce school violence and minimize classroom disruption. Conflict resolution training impacts the school as a whole by improving the overall school climate and by reducing violence.

The Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management (1994) initiated a three-year School Conflict Management Demonstration Project. Thirty schools reflecting the state's diversity participated in the study. This study investigated a wide variety of approaches, such as the mediation approach, the whole school approach, and the classroom approach. Results were assessed and they analyzed questionnaires, discipline reports and interviews conducted by independent researchers. The findings include decreases in disciplinary actions, 50% reduction in suspensions, and improved school climates. They also reviewed student surveys and found students' attitudes toward conflict improved, and students had increased understanding of nonviolent problem-solving methods, and enhanced communication skills. This is one of the largest studies ever undertaken in school conflict resolution research. It included over 30 schools in rural, urban and suburban communities. Three years of qualitative data were evaluated (Ohio Commission on Dispute and Conflict Management, 1994). Students increased their ability to handle conflict and there were fewer administrative disciplinary actions. Programs like this give students control and responsibility, and ownership.

Another peer mediation program was effective in reducing disciplinary referrals, but it did not change the school climate or the students' attitudes, possibly because not all students received the training. Smith, Daunic, Miller and Robinson (2002), examined a

conflict resolution peer mediation program in three middle schools in rural North Florida. Peer mediators were selected from each school and trained to be mediators. In addition, a school-wide program of five lessons was taught to all students. The study lasted four years and looked at student attitudes, school climate, resolution of conflicts, and discipline referrals. They found no school-wide change in students' attitudes or teachers' views of school climate. They concluded that for attitude changes to occur the whole school environment should be entrenched in the program. There was however, a reduction in disciplinary referrals. According to Smith et al. (2000), the research base for the effectiveness of school-based conflict resolution and peer mediation programs is limited, and they believe that more thoroughly well designed studies need to occur.

Comprehensive programs where all students are trained, and the training is also integrated into the curriculum and spiraled over years is much more effective than the cadre approach. To change attitudes and improve the school climate in the long-term training is needed for all students. Resolving Conflict Creatively (RCCP) is a K-12 comprehensive, multi-year strategy for preventing violence and creating caring and peaceable communities. RCCP serves 400 schools in 16 urban, suburban and rural school districts. It is a research-based school program that increases social and emotional learning. It serves all NY Public School children (Lantieri & Patti, 1996).

According to Lantieri and Patti (1996), RCCP follows the peaceable schools model. It requires a commitment of at least five years of any school system. It is a K-12 curriculum, and it incorporates training for teachers, administrators, and parents (Lantieri & Patti 1996). The primary goal of the RCCP program is to ensure young people develop the skills they need to develop caring relationships and healthy lives. According to

Selfridge (2004), it is challenging to synthesize the research on this program, because districts and teachers modify the program and curriculum to be specific to their district or schools' needs. However, Anchorage Schools reported a positive association between RCCP implementation and academic achievement and a more positive school environment.

Furthermore, New York City Schools findings state that positive social behaviors increased and academic achievement increased. Atlanta Schools stated that teachers reported less violence, increased student cooperation and parents reported self-improvement in communication and problem solving. Additionally, 87% of teachers in New York reported children used conflict resolution skills, less violence, increased self-esteem and empowerment. Ninety percent of teachers rated the program as excellent and 96% infuse the training into the curriculum. RCCP also had documented benefits such as lower rates of suspensions in middle school and lower rates of high school dropout (Selfridge, 2004).

Whole School and Whole Classroom Approaches

Approaches where all students are instructed in the use of conflict resolution techniques are called whole school or whole-classroom approaches. They are also referred to as peaceable classroom and peaceable school approaches (LeBoeuf, Delany-Shabazz 1997). Peaceable classroom is a whole classroom methodology that includes teaching students the foundations, principles and problem-solving processes of conflict resolution. It is incorporated into the core subjects and into the whole classroom management repertoire (LeBoeuf et al. 1997). Peaceable school programs build on the peaceable classroom approach by incorporating conflict resolution into the management

of the entire institution with all members learning and using the strategies. There are many various programs being implemented in US schools. However, two of the most common programs are RCCP and the Teaching Students to be Peacemakers Program (TSP). Teaching Students to be Peacemakers Program is a 12-year spiral program that is taught each year in a more sophisticated and complex way (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Johnson & Johnson (2005) state that it takes years to develop the skills to be become competent in resolving conflicts and any thought that a few hours of training is enough to train students in a high level of competence is misguided.

Johnson and others (1995) state that opinion and anecdotal evidence is helpful, but they call for carefully conducted research that specifically addresses the effectiveness of conflict resolution training in teaching students to constructively manage conflict. Furthermore, they question whether students actually learn the conflict resolution procedures and ask whether students can apply the procedures to actual conflicts.

Johnson & Johnson conducted a study with 176 middle school students who were assigned to an experimental and control group. The experimental group received the training and the control group received no training. They used a pretest and posttest control group experimental design. Students received training three times each week for a total of 14 hours of training. Pretest and posttest measurements were paper and pencil tests. First students wrote how they would resolve conflicts by listing the steps of negotiation. Next, they read two conflict scenarios and responded by writing how they would handle each situation. The results indicated that before training most students did not use negotiation to resolve conflicts, but after training 75% of students listed 100% of the negotiation steps as the procedure they would use. Furthermore, 34% of students used

negotiation as a major strategy and another 22% proposed alternative agreements without indication of the steps of negotiation. In response to the conflict scenarios, after training 50% of trained students indicated they would negotiate as opposed to 10% of the controls. According to Johnson & Johnson (1994), this study shows that conflict resolution training is effective at teaching students to manage conflicts constructively. Fourteen hours of training was effective to teach the negotiation skills, but Johnson & Johnson question whether students will retain the skills over time or apply them to real life experiences.

Johnson & Johnson (1994) also investigated the effectiveness of conflict resolution training with elementary school students. The purpose of the study was to determine the types of conflicts children engage in, whether students need to be educated to manage conflicts constructively, whether students can learn and apply the negotiation and mediation skills to new conflicts that arise, and whether students would use the procedures and skills and therefore reduce the number of disruptive problems in the classroom.

The sample consisted of 92 students in grades one through six from four middle class classrooms in a suburban school. Again they used the pre and posttest design, and classrooms that participated were selected at random from teachers who volunteered to participate. Target classrooms received conflict resolution training for 30 minutes per day for six weeks. Results were assessed using the conflict scenarios and a videotaped simulation of a role-play. The training was drawn from the curriculum of Teaching Students to be Peacemakers Johnson & Johnson (20025). Post measures were administered both two and four weeks after the training.

The results indicated that 83 of the 92 students recalled 100% of the negotiation steps and before training half the students indicated on the scenario measure that they would tell the teacher. However, after training only 15% indicated they would tell the teacher. The role-play measure indicated that 80% of students used the six-step negotiation pattern. The teachers and principal reported they spent less time resolving student conflicts (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). This study shows that conflict resolution training is effective with elementary students as a way to increase their ability to resolve conflicts constructively.

Even younger students can learn to resolve conflicts effectively. Students of all ages from kindergarten and up can learn to negotiate if they are trained. According to Johnson and Johnson (2001), numerous conflict resolution and peer mediation programs have been implemented, but very little empirical evidence has been done to determine the effectiveness of the training. In contrast, Johnson and Johnson conducted 17 studies on the Teaching Students to be Peacemakers Program in eight different schools involving students from kindergarten to ninth grades. The studies included rural, suburban, and urban settings. Johnson and Johnson (2001) conducted a meta-analysis to systematically review the effectiveness of the Teaching Students to be Peacemakers Program.

In the studies included in the meta-analysis the independent variable was the presence or absence of the conflict resolution training. In the training groups students received nine to fifteen hours of training. Eleven of the studies involved control groups. In seven of the studies the classrooms and/or controls were randomly selected and in four studies students were assigned randomly to conditions. In nine of the studies teachers were rotated across conditions. A variety of dependent variables were employed in the

studies. Not every dependent variable was assessed in every study, and different versions of a dependent version were used in different studies (Johnson & Johnson 2001). The dependent variables included: academic achievement and retention, knowledge of negotiation and mediation procedures and application of the negotiation procedures, and student attitudes toward conflict

After conducting the meta-analysis Johnson & Johnson (2001) found that students do learn how to negotiate to a total recall level. Students also retained this knowledge months later. Results of the scenario measures indicated that students were able to apply negotiation and mediation procedures to actual conflicts. Observation reports and interviews with teachers, and principals indicated that students did use the techniques in playground, classroom and home situations. They also found that when conflict resolution training was integrated into the academic curriculum, academic achievement increased. Johnson & Johnson (2001) further concluded that without conflict resolution training, many students might never learn how to constructively manage conflicts. In conclusion, this meta-analysis demonstrates that Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers is an effective conflict resolution-training program for students of a wide array of ages. Conflict Resolution Training Integrated Into The Curriculum

To be life-long capable negotiators, students need to practice skills and apply them to a wide arena. Conflict resolution can be an effective way to improve critical thinking and academics. According to Johnson & Johnson (2001), it is important to link conflict resolution training with academic learning, because curriculum integration provides an arena for continued and frequent practice of conflict resolution procedures, and it can increase academic achievement. In response, two middle school counselors

became interested in determining whether teaching conflict resolution strategies connected across the curriculum would increase and enhance student achievement, problem-solving ability, and self-efficacy of middle school students (Poynton, Carlson, Hopper, Carey, 2006). Participants included 115 seventh and eighth grade students from a rural northwestern school. Two school counselors partnered with four classroom teachers. Two classes were the intervention group and two classes were the comparison group. Teachers were chosen by their willingness to use instructional time, and the classes were matched. Both groups took pretest and posttests.

The intervention group received instruction two times per week for nine weeks. They received 18 lessons in conflict resolution that were integrated into the regular curriculum. The objective was to learn conflict resolution techniques and strategies and make connections with multiple curricular areas such as math, reading and social studies. Counselors and teachers engaged in team-teaching. The students also took the IOWA Test of Basic Skills, Washington Assessment of Learning, Quizzle to assess problem solving skills, and the Problem Solving and Logical Reasoning Survey. The results indicated that the intervention had the largest impact on self-confidence and logical reasoning. Results also indicated improved self-efficacy beliefs. However, the results did not indicate substantial improvement in academic achievement (Poynton et al. 2006). However, the training increased students' confidence and critical thinking.

Anyone can benefit from conflict resolution training. Even students in kindergarten can learn to negotiate conflicts peacefully. Stevahn, Johnson & Johnson (2000) conducted a study on the effectiveness of conflict resolution training integrated into the curriculum with kindergarten students. Stevahn et al. (2000) questioned whether

kindergarten children can learn conflict resolution procedures and whether children that young could learn to seek agreements that maximize mutual gain. Participants were 80 kindergarten students in four classrooms in a suburban elementary school. This study incorporated all the kindergarteners in the whole school, and students were assigned randomly across conditions. The experimental condition taught conflict resolution procedures as an integrated component of a friendship unit. The control group received no conflict resolution training. They used a pre and posttest design.

An analysis was conducted to see if there were differences between the two groups. Results show that after training the experimental group included significantly more negotiation steps in their description of how they would handle conflict. The experimental group was also more willing and able to apply negotiation procedures to conflict situations. Children not only learned integrative negotiation, but also internalized it. This study validated the curriculum approach to training as well as demonstrated that five and six year old children can learn the procedures and can transfer and apply them (Stevahn, Johnson & Johnson 2000). Integration is an effective way to teach negotiation skills and even young children can learn and apply the skills.

Integration is an effective way to teach conflict resolution and will increase academic skills and critical thinking. Stevanh, Johnson & Johnson (2002), further expanded their research to high school students. They examined the effectiveness of conflict resolution training and its impact on academic achievement when it is integrated into the high school social studies curriculum. They questioned whether students would learn the conflict resolution procedures, apply the procedures, use integrative negotiation techniques, increase their academic achievement, and whether student attitudes toward

conflict would change. Ninety-two 9th graders from a suburban high school in California participated in the study. Students were randomly assigned to conditions. The conflict-training group received training through an integrated social studies unit on World War II. Students were evaluated using a multiple of measures to evaluate whether they learned the negotiation steps, retention of learning the steps, applying the procedures, student attitudes toward conflict, and academic achievement. Results indicated that 92% of the experimental group students recalled all or most steps of negotiation. The trained students also used more constructive strategies to solve conflicts. Trained students were also more likely to use integrative strategies. Trained students also displayed greater academic achievement in both social studies and language arts (Stevahn et al. 2002). This study was replicated with a western civilization class and achieved similar results. These results indicate that training was effective in increasing academic achievement and in teaching resolution strategies. This is important, because teachers will not be motivated to use a stand-alone program or a program that does not increase academic skills.

Stevahn, Munger and Kealy (2005) examined the effectiveness of the whole school/whole classroom approach in a French immersion elementary school. This study investigated the effectiveness of conflict resolution training on an entire student body. All 302 students received the training in their classrooms in both English and French. Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers lessons were integrated throughout the curriculum and the whole school participated. Results replicated those of other Teaching Students To Be Peacemaker studies, and found that the training is effective. This further supports the claim that students who are not taught how to manage conflict constructively may never learn to do so (Stevahn et al. 2005).

Peer Mediation and Cadre Programs

According to Rogers (1994) peer mediation is a method of resolving conflict that helps people involved in a disagreement to reach a mutually acceptable agreement with the help of neutral mediator. The cadre approach to peer mediation involves training a small number of students to be peer mediators. This approach assumes that a few specially trained students can defuse and mediate the conflicts taking place in the entire student body (Johnson & Johnson 2005). The advantage of the cadre approach is that it is less time consuming and less expensive than the whole classroom or whole school approaches (Johnson & Johnson 2005). Many schools initiate this approach due to these reasons.

Peer mediation programs encourage students to become problem solvers and responsible citizens (Williamson, Warner, Sanders, Knepper 1999). In the elementary school level, mediators usually work in dyads on the playground, in the lunchroom, or in the classroom. At the secondary level, mediators usually have cases referred to them and mediations take place in a more formal setting. Research indicates that peer mediation is an effective way to resolve conflicts and lower discipline referrals in elementary and secondary schools as well (Wolowiec, 1994).

Peer Mediation in Elementary Schools

Cadre approaches may not be as effective as a more comprehensive school wide programs, but they can be an effective way to reduce discipline referrals. They are clealy better than no intervention. According to Bickmore (2002), The Cleveland Ohio School District initiated a peer mediation program in 28 elementary schools. Cleveland is a large urban district with an enrollment of 75,000 students. They selected 25-30 students in

grades three to five in each of the schools to attend three day peer mediation training and to serve as mediators over a two-year period. Researchers collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The results indicated that suspension was clearly reduced, achievement test scores increased, and students understanding and inclination toward nonviolent conflict resolution increased greatly (Bickmore, 2002). This large-scale study offers strong evidence of the effectiveness of a cadre program approach.

(Johnson, Johnson, Mitchell, Cotton, Harris & Louison (2001) examined the effectiveness of a peer mediation program in an inner-city elementary school. The purpose of the study was to identify the type of conflicts, strategies used to resolve them, and what types of solutions were derived. Forty-seven third and fourth graders received one and a half days training and worked in partners as mediators. Johnson (et al. 2001) found that peer mediation was an effective way to resolve student conflicts. Mediators successfully resolved 98% of conflicts. Most conflicts involved relationship issues and students generally used physical or verbal force in their attempt to resolve the problem prior to mediation. Johnson and Johnson (2001) conducted a similar study in a midwestern·elementary school and had similar findings. These studies demonstrate that third and fourth grade students can successfully mediate conflicts for their peers. Cadre programs are an effective way to reduce violence and increase positively resolved conflicts.

Hart and Gunty (1997) investigated the impact of a peer mediation program on the environment of an elementary school. They compared two matched elementary schools using a pre and posttest design. One school had a peer mediation program initiated and the other school did not. The conflict management environment of the two

schools compared by examining the outcomes of conflicts, the number of conflicts and the time off teaching to resolve students conflicts. The results indicated that the number of student conflicts and the average time off teaching per conflict decreased significantly in the school with a mediation program. This study suggests that a cadre approach to mediation can improve the school environment and increase the teaching time on task.

Middle School Cadre Programs

Bell, Coleman, Anderson & Whelan (2000) investigated the effectiveness of a peer mediation cadre program in a low-income rural elementary school. Mediators were in sixth to eighth grade. Students completed a skills retention test after mediation training. Additionally, the number and outcome of the mediations that occurred were documented. Teachers completed effectiveness questionnaires and schools wide measures compared the number of office referrals and suspensions. The results indicated that the training was successful, because mediators were able to resolve conflicts 94% of the times. There were fewer discipline referrals and fewer suspensions than the prior year.

The suspension rate was at an all time high at McNair Middle School prior to the inception of the peer mediation program (Thompson, 1996). A pilot peer mediation program was initiated in order to promote a positive school environment, increase school safety, and reduce discipline referrals. Twenty-five students were trained as peer mediators and received two 20-day training sessions. After one year suspensions were reduced 18.5% and by the second year 50% reductions occurred. There were reduced incidences of fighting, increased self-esteem, enhanced problem-solving, and improved morale (Thompson, 1996). Peer mediation programs can succeed and results can occur

within the first and second years. This study further verifies that peer mediation cadre programs can be a very effective way of reducing discipline problems and improving the school environment.

Summary

In summary, the current research indicates that conflict resolution training would be an effective way to teach students to resolve conflicts and thereby reduce school violence. The research suggests that kindergarten through high school students would effectively learn to use conflict resolution strategies to resolve conflicts in a peaceful and positive way. According to the present research, students need to learn conflict strategies and how to negotiate conflicts in order to reduce violence in the school, improve the school climate, and improve attitudes regarding conflict.

CHAPTER III: DESIGN

Participants

The participants of this experiment consisted of two 3rd grade classes at a rural elementary school in Salem County, New Jersey. The school is located in a middle class school district. There was an experimental group and a control group. The experimental group was taught all subjects by the principal researcher, and the control group was taught all subjects by another third grade teacher. Both teachers were equally qualified and certified in the State of New Jersey. The experimental group consisted of 20 students with 10 males and 10 females. The control group consisted of 20 students with 9 females and 11 males. There were a total of 40 participants. The predominant race in both classes was Caucasian and the students were all 8 or 9 years old.

Five students were eliminated from the study due to incomplete data. Three students were eliminated from the experimental groups and two students were eliminated from the control group due to incomplete data. This resulted in 35 participants.

Materials

The experimenter developed conflict resolution lessons using materials and lessons from the New Jersey Bar Association, *Teaching Students to be Peacemakers* (Johnson & Johnson, 2005) and *Teaching Conflict Resolution Through Children's Literature* (Kreidler, 1994). Lessons were adapted to be age appropriate for children in third grade. Prior to beginning any conflict resolution education, students completed a pretest to assess their knowledge of the steps of conflict resolution. Students were asked to list and describe the steps they would use to solve a conflict with someone. The teacher provided the directions orally, and the students were also provided with written

directions. Students recorded their answers on a worksheet in a list format (see Appendix A). The experimenter developed a rubric to assess the knowledge and recall of the steps of conflict resolution (see Appendix B).

Students also completed a response to a conflict scenario to assess prior knowledge and ability to use conflict resolution strategies. Students read a short scenario about a conflict that would typically occur in third grade at their school (see Appendix C). Students completed a written response describing and explaining what they would do and say to handle the situation. The scenario essays were scored using a rubric to assess students' level of utilizing positive conflict resolution techniques (see Appendix D). The rubric was developed by the experimenter and rated students' application of the conflict resolution techniques. All assessments were repeated as a posttest after the students received six weeks of conflict resolution training and instruction. The experimenter created all assessments and rubrics.

Method

Prior to the experiment and conflict resolution training students frequently engaged in conflicts over materials, order in line, working together on projects, and many other common classroom activities. Students frequently handled conflict by telling the teacher and expected the teacher to solve their problems for them. Students did not know how to resolve their own conflicts without adult intervention and would not even try to resolve issues on their own. Frequent disruption occurred as the teacher served as mediator and problem-solver. Instructional time was compromised. Students frequently argued about trivial matters. Students received several lessons about using I messages,

anger management, and bullying as part of the guidance program. However, students did not engage in any comprehensive conflict resolution or peer mediation type program.

The experimental group was selected because they were the experimenter's self-contained classroom. The experimenter's third grade class was the only third grade class out of six to receive conflict resolution training. The control group was randomly selected from the remaining five 3rd grade classes. Students were originally placed in the classes at random prior to the beginning of the school year.

Prior to the study both the experimental group and the control group completed a pretest that required them to list and describe the steps of conflict resolution (see Appendix A). Both groups also read a conflict scenario and responded by writing a response describing what they would do when faced with a conflict (see Appendix B). This established the prior knowledge students had of the steps of conflict resolution and established what conflict resolution skills students knew how to apply in conflicts. Both teachers provided directions for each assessment and answered the students' questions about the directions.

The day after completing the pretest assessments the experimental group was introduced to conflict resolution training. The control group received no training or intervention. The experimental group engaged in various lessons and activities aimed at increasing awareness of conflict, anger control, negotiation, perspective taking, assertiveness, using "I" messages, and problem-solving. Some lessons were integrated into the language arts curriculum and others were isolation lessons. The teacher modeled the six steps of conflict resolution and negotiation and practiced role-plays in small groups. The training occurred daily for six weeks. Students received 30 lessons that were

30 to 40 minutes long. Additionally, minilessons and reinforcement lessons were integrated throughout the curriculum. The lessons took place between 2:15 to 3:15 in the afternoon daily. During language arts, literature was used to teach conflict awareness, perspective taking, and problem solving. The teacher modeled role-playing and mediation techniques during class and on the playground. The control group received no training or intervention.

After the six weeks of training ended the students completed the posttest assessments. These were the exact assessments given as pretests prior to the study. Both the experimental and control groups completed the pretests and the posttests. Students were assessed to see whether they learned the six steps of conflict resolution, and whether they could apply the strategies to an actual conflict scenario. The assessments were given to determine if the training was effective.

Independent and Dependent Variables

The independent variable in this experiment was the conflict resolution training. The dependent variables were the written recall of the steps of conflict resolution and the written response to the conflict scenario that were initiated before and after the study. It was expected that the students in the experimental group would recall significantly more of the steps of conflict resolution training after the training than before the training. It was also expected that experimental group would utilize a higher level of conflict resolution strategies in their responses to the conflict scenarios after receiving the training. Furthermore, students in the experimental group were expected to increase their knowledge of the conflict resolution steps and increase their ability to apply the strategies to conflict scenarios significantly more than the control group. Additionally, it was

expected that the control group would show no significant changes in their recall of the steps of conflict resolution or their application of the conflict resolution strategies to the conflict scenarios.

Analysis of Data

After the six weeks of conflict resolution training were complete, the scores from the pretest and the posttest of the experimental group and control group were collected. The pre and posttests were compared using a two-way mixed factorial analyses with a pre and posttest design. The results were analyzed using a within and between group analysis. Pre and posttests for each group were compared for each assessment. Additionally, the two groups were also compared to determine if there was a significant main effect.

Summary

During this experiment, one third grade class received conflict resolution training and a randomly selected third grade class at the same school received no intervention and served as a control group. The experimental group received six weeks of conflict resolution training that was taught both in isolation and integrated into the curriculum. Both groups completed pre and post assessments to determine their knowledge of the steps of conflict resolution and their application of the strategies to a realistic conflict scenario. Rubric scores were collected and mean differences were calculated between the pretest and posttest for the experimental and control group. They were analyzed using a two way mixed factorial analysis of variance to determine if the pre and posttests for each group differed significantly and to determine if the two groups differed significantly. This would indicate whether the training was effective. It was expected that the pre and post

30

test scores for the experimental group would differ significantly, and the pre and posttest scores for the control group would not. It was expected that the experimental group would experience a more significant increase in scores than the control group. It was expected that there would be a significant difference between the scores of the two groups overall.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover the effectiveness of conflict resolution training with third grade elementary school students. It was hypothesized that the experimental group of students receiving the conflict resolution training would learn the six steps of conflict resolution, and they would be able to apply conflict resolution strategies to resolve conflicts with peers. This would be supported by a significant increase in the ability to name the six steps of conflict resolution as measured by pre and posttests. Students would also be able to name significantly more steps after training than the control group, since the control group did not receive any intervention. Additionally, the experimental group would demonstrate higher-level responses in using negotiation and problem-solving strategies when responding to a conflict scenario than prior to training as evidenced by the pre and posttest scores. They would also score significantly higher than the control group on this same measure. This would be evidenced by a significant difference in the scores on the conflict scenario measure between the two groups. Furthermore, the experimental group would know how to employ conflict resolution strategies to resolve conflicts more constructively and peacefully then the control group. Comparing the two groups for a main effect would support this.

Results

Prior to beginning the conflict resolution training study, all students in both the experimental and control groups took a pretest to indicate recall of the six steps of

conflict resolution (see Appendix A) and a pretest of responding to a conflict scenario (see Appendix B). These tests were repeated at the conclusion of the conflict resolution training. Pre and posttests for recall of the six steps of conflict resolution were scored according to how many of the six steps were correctly recalled out of the six resulting in a score of 0 to 6 (see Appendix B). The pre and posttest conflict scenario responses were scored using a rubric ranging from 0 to 7 for the use of conflict strategies (see Appendix D). Data was recorded for each condition group. There were 17 subjects in the experimental group and 18 in the control group.

A two way mixed factorial analysis of variance with a pre and posttest control design was conducted. Results were analyzed using within and between group analyses. Pretest scores on the step recall test were similar for both groups. The mean score for the experimental group was .5882, and the mean score for the control groups was .4444. Both groups were similarly not able to name the six steps of conflict resolution. Both groups named less than one step correctly. On the step posttest the mean for the experimental group was 5.1765 steps recalled and the mean for the control group was .0000. The control group actually scored lower on the posttest, and the experimental group was able to name 5 steps. Posttest scores on the step posttest were compared with the pretest scores for the experimental group and there was a significant difference $F = 111.73, p \leq .000$ at df (1,33). Students in the experimental group named significantly more steps during the post-test. This indicates that students learned the steps as a result of the conflict resolution training, and the training was effective. Furthermore, the posttest scores for the experimental and control groups were compared and the experimental group named significantly more steps on the posttest than the controls $F = 163.984, p \leq .000$ df (1,33).

This indicates the experimental group's gain was due to the conflict resolution training not to other factors.

Pre and posttest scores for the conflict scenario response were also analyzed for both groups. The experimental group scored a mean of 3.5294 on the pretest and the control group scored a mean of 2.5000. On the posttest the experimental group scored a mean of 4.8235 and the control group scored a mean of 2.6667. The experimental group used a significantly higher level of strategies to resolve the conflict $F = 8.791, p$ .006 df (1,33) on the post-test as opposed to the pretest. This indicates that the conflict resolution training had a positive effect on the students' ability to apply conflict resolution strategies to conflict scenarios. (see figures 4.1 and 4.2).

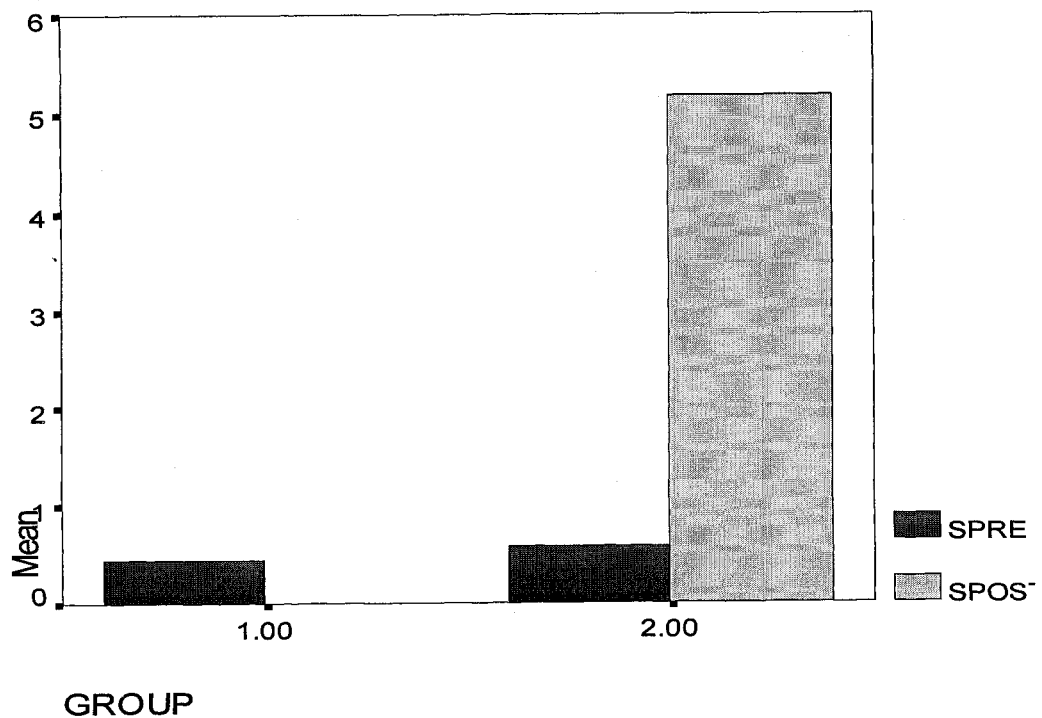*Figure* 4.3 Mean pre and posttest scores for the step recall test.

Figure 4.2 Mean pre and posttest scores for the conflict scenario response.
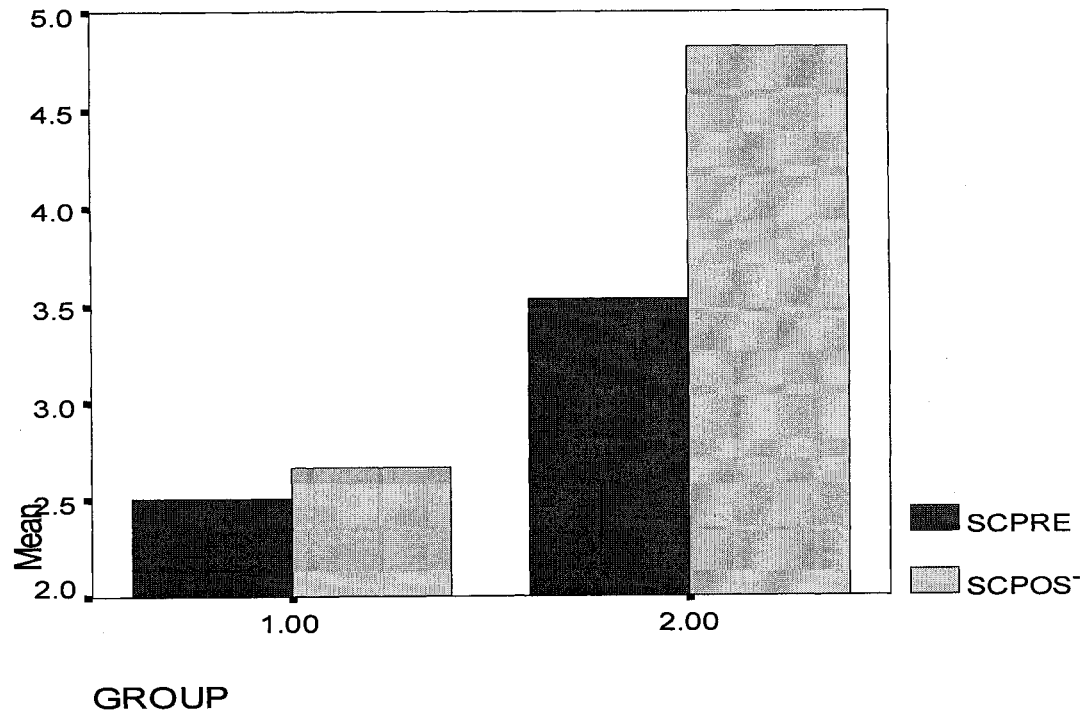
Further analysis compared the overall posttest scores between the groups for both

the step and scenario measures. A significant main effect was found between the goups F

$= 18.263, p \le .000$, df $(1,33)$. This main effect supports the hypothesis that conflict

resolution training was effective because the experimental group had statistically

significantly higher posttest scores overall for the steps and scenario test combined. This

supports the effectiveness of conflict resolution training, since the students who received

the training were able to name significantly more steps, and they applied significantly

more strategies to resolve a conflict in a scenario. Conflict resolution training improved

the experimental group's ability to resolve conflicts peacefully.

Summary

In summary there was a two way mixed factorial analysis conducted in the study.
A significant difference was found between the experimental and control groups in regard
to the naming and recall of the six steps of conflict resolution with the experimental
group naming more steps after the training than the control group. There was also a
significant increase in the number of steps recalled by the experimental group as
indicated by the comparison of the pre and posttests of step recall, indicating the conflict
resolution training was effective in teaching the steps to resolve a conflict.

Additionally, a significant difference was found between the experimental group
and the control group in regard to the conflict resolution scenario response. The
experimental group was able to resolve conflicts using strategies more effectively and
peacefully than the control group. Furthermore, the experimental group learned and
applied conflict resolution strategies significantly more in the posttest than in the pretest
indicating the conflict resolution training was effective in teaching students to resolve
conflicts more peacefully. An overall comparison of the step and scenario posttests
combined and compared between groups indicated a main effect with the experimental
group scoring significantly higher than the control group. This supports the hypothesis
that conflict resolution training is effective.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Review of Results

After reviewing the data it was found that conflict resolution training is effective in teaching students the steps of conflict resolution to resolve conflicts. This supports the hypothesis that conflict resolution training would increase a student's knowledge of the steps required to resolve conflicts. It also supports the hypothesis that student's could apply strategies to resolve conflicts peacefully. This research supports the wider range of prior studies indicating the effectiveness of conflict resolution training. Johnson & Johnson (2005) conducted various types of conflict resolution training and concluded that direct instruction in conflict resolution is effective.

This study provides evidence that direct instruction in conflict resolution increases a student's knowledge of the steps to resolve a conflict and increases a student's knowledge of how to resolve conflicts using less aggressive strategies and more peaceful methods. Without direct instruction in conflict resolution strategies, some students may never learn to resolve conflicts effectively and peacefully. Although the study found conflict resolution training to be effective in a controlled classroom environment, it is not known how students would actually apply strategies or go through the six steps in a real life situation. It is also questionable whether students will retain what they have learned over a long period of time.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study was the length of the study. Due to time constraints the study was limited to six weeks of training. Although the six week training

showed that conflict resolution training was effective, a longer period of training may have produced a larger effect. Johnson & Johnson (2005) the originators of Teaching Student to be Peacemakers suggest a 12-year spiral curriculum for the greatest effect. They state that fully internalizing the strategies requires a lengthy training period and repeated practice.

Another limitation relates to the administration of the assessments and of the training itself. Two different teachers taught the experimental group and the control group, and these two teachers also administered the assessments. The teacher of the experimental group was the researcher. The two teachers may have administered the assessments differently. The students may also have been more motivated to complete the posttests in the researcher's class, since they had received six weeks of training and were also very eager to please the teacher. The control group may have lacked some motivation to complete the posttests. They may have viewed this as unimportant, since they had not received the intervention and had already completed the assessments. Furthermore, the teacher teaching the experimental group the conflict resolution strategies had never taught conflict resolution before. Her inexperience with the subject matter may have produced lower results than an experienced teacher of conflict strategies.

In addition, there were some limitations concerning the sample. The sample size was quite small with only 17 participants in the experimental group and 18 participants in the control group. A larger sample may have produced different results. The two groups were also not matched for intelligence, achievement, or personality or any other factors, so there may have been other factors in play that were not controlled. The sample also

was not very diverse as far as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and age. Most students in both groups were middle class Caucasian students who were placed in regular education. All students were in third grade. The results of the study are limited to this sample's characteristics.

An interesting limitation of the study was the exposure of the control group to conflict resolution topics. The experimental and control group both attended a puppet show and a play in which the topic of each was conflict resolution. There were also posters hanging around the school in the halls and common areas listing the steps to resolve a conflict. However, the control group still had a mean of zero steps of conflict resolution recalled on the six steps of conflict resolution posttest. The control group recalled fewer steps after the six weeks even after being exposed to the above factors.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this study showed a significant difference between the pre and posttests for the experimental group for both measures of steps recalled and strategies applied to conflict scenarios. When compared with the control group the experimental group showed significantly more improvement than the control group on all measures. When the results of both measures were aggregated and the two groups were compared, the experimental group showed significantly more improvement overall. The results of this study indicate that conflict resolution training is an effective way to teach students how to resolve conflicts peacefully.

Implications for Further Research

There is a need to conduct more research on the actual application of conflict strategies in real life situations. Although students may demonstrate skill during pencil

and paper assessment it would be more authentic to conduct research through observation of actual use of strategies. More research also should address application of the strategies over a longer period of time. Perhaps a longitudinal study where students were followed for a period of years. In addition, further research would be beneficial for specific groups of children such as: socioeconomic groups, age groups and special education students. Additional research on curriculum integration of conflict resolution topic versus freestanding lessons would also be beneficial. More research on the length and type of training would be important. For example, is a 12-year spiral with curriculum integration more effective than short term 30 hour training sessions? Although there have already been a large number of studies conducted on conflict resolution, there are still many areas that need to be explored. If we as a society want to decrease violence, we must learn to resolve our conflicts peacefully, because there is no way to eliminate conflicts from our world. Additional research in these areas may increase our knowledge of how to best prepare our youth to manage conflicts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Recall of the Steps Assessment

APPENDIX A

Recall of the Steps Assessment

Directions: List and describe the six steps of conflict resolution. Pretend you have a conflict with another person. List step by step the way to solve a conflict and explain what you would do.

1._____

_____

_____

2._____

_____

_____

3._____

_____

_____

4._____

_____

_____

5._____

_____

_____

6._____

_____

_____

APPENDIX B

Six Step Rubric

APPENDIX B

Six Step Rubric

0 Points: No steps recalled.

1 Point: Recalls one step.

2 Points: Recalls two steps.

3 Points: Recalls three steps.

4 Points: Recalls four steps.

5 Points: Recalls five steps.

6 Points: Recalls six steps.

APPENDIX C

Conflict Scenario Assessment

APPENDIX C

Conflict Scenario Assessment

Directions: Read the following scenario. Think about how you would resolve the conflict with the other person. Write what you would do to solve the problem and how you would respond if this really happened to you.

It is lunchtime at your school. You enter the cafeteria and put your lunchbox on the table next to your friend John. You realize you need a napkin, so you get up and get one. When you return to the table Sydney is in your seat and has moved your lunchbox to another spot. You want your seat back. Sydney says she's sitting there now. What would you do?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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_____

APPENDIX D

Conflict Scenario Rubric

APPENDIX D
Conflict Scenario Rubric

Points are assigned according to the student's response.

- 0 points: No response or doesn't know what to do.

- 1 point: Uses physical or verbal aggression

- 2 points: Withdraws from the situation or walks away.

- 3 points: Tells the teacher

- 4 points: Asks the other person to give them what is wanted.

- 5 points: Provides alternatives for the other person to do.

- 6 points: Uses some negotiation: I'll do this if they do that.

- 7 points: Negotiates for a win-win solution that both parties would be happy with. Mentions several solutions to solve the problem that would be beneficial to both parties.