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EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A  
PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM IN AN  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING

By  
Theresa M. Davidson

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
Of  
The Graduate School  
At  
Rowan University  
May 2003

Approved by

Professor

Date Approved

May 2003

## Abstract

Davidson, Theresa M.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of a  
Peer Mediation Program in an  
Elementary School Setting  
May 2003  
Ronald L. Capasso, Ed. D.  
School Administration

The purpose of this study was to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of a peer mediation program on students with behavioral problems and conflicts using an action research design. Further, it informed teachers, administrators, parents, and the guidance department as to the progress of the program.

All students at Mennies Elementary School in Vineland had, if needed, the opportunity to be involved in the conflict resolution program. The participants in the program were in traditional, bilingual, and special education classes. All stakeholders served as the primary data-gathering instruments in the research. To determine if peer mediation improved the climate in the school and community, the intern relied on teacher, student, and parental feedback. Also used was an evaluation form completed by participating students in the peer mediation program.

To determine the effectiveness of a peer mediation program for character building and positive conflict resolution strategies, the intern analyzed data on an ongoing basis. This analysis derived from information collected from student evaluation forms and feedback from teachers and parents.

The findings of this study provided insight into the school's discipline needs. Furthermore, students who participated in peer mediation were pleased with the results and have gained positive conflict resolution strategies.

## Mini-Abstract

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## Acknowledgments

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Focus of the Study

Too many of our young children are caught up in conflicts everyday that they do not know how to manage. Juvenile delinquency and violence are symptoms of children's inability to manage conflicts in their lives. The intern wanted to teach children how to manage conflicts in a productive way that may help reduce incidents of violent behavior. The Vineland School District encourages the implementation of peer mediation groups throughout its schools. The intern believes a beneficial component of violence prevention is conflict resolution education. The intern gathered data on existing programs and attended peer mediation training provided by the district. This program contributed to the improvement of the climate in school and the community by reducing the number of disruptive and violent acts, by reducing the number of disciplinary referrals, and by increasing the self-esteem and self-respect, as well as the personal responsibility and self-discipline, of the students involved in the program.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to describe and evaluate the effectiveness of a peer mediation group on consistently behavioral problem students using an action research design. Further, it will inform teachers, administrators, parents, and the guidance department as to the progress of the program.

### Definitions

*Juvenile delinquency*---Unlawful behavior by a boy or girl usually under 18 years of age.

*Peer mediation*---The resolving of conflicts with another party through discussion and reasoning.

*Disciplinary referrals*---Detention slips completed by teachers for the school administrator.

*HSPT*---High School Proficiency Exam.

### Limitations

The intern was limited by time restraints. Peer mediation met during the intern's lunch hour and prep period, which created a conflict of time with students' and other teachers' schedules. The boundaries of the project limited the ability to generalize any results beyond Mennies Elementary School. In addition, the intern was limited to low teacher participation due to dependency on traditional discipline procedures. The techniques used for gathering data were limited to a daily log of meetings and evaluations from participating members.

### Setting of the Study

The study took place at Mennies Elementary School in the Vineland School District. Mrs. Lisa B. Arena, Assistant Principal, served as the intern's mentor, and Mrs. Annette Rudd is the newly appointed Principal. Both administrators played a key role in guiding the intern throughout the internship, as well as provided a wealth of knowledge and resources.

First called Landisville by its founder Charles Landis, Vineland came to be known by its present name in 1861. Considered the center for scientific glassware production, farming, and manufacturing in Southern New Jersey, it is located 41 miles east of Philadelphia and 41 miles west of Atlantic City. According to the *Vineland Demographic Trend Report* published in 2002, the 2001 population was estimated to be approximately 64,329. The population by race/ethnicity is made up of 43.5% white, 20.3% black, 1.0% American Indian/Eskimo, 1.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 34.1% other. Hispanic ethnicity accounts for 59.4% of Vineland's population. The median age of residents living in Vineland is 29 years of age, and the average household income is \$46,315.

The increased growth in Vineland's population has presented the Vineland Board of Education with a host of problems, the most important being the severe overcrowding of schools. For many classroom teachers, class size has increased from 21 to 28 students in just the past 7 years. This trend is reflected in: two preschool sites, all four kindergarten centers, all seven elementary schools (first through fourth grades), all four middle schools (fifth through eighth grades), and in both the 9-10 and the 11-12 high schools. A plan was proposed to build a new middle school that would house the 1,700 students in the sixth through eighth grades. The plan would have converted the existing middle schools to elementary facilities, which would house full-time kindergartens through fifth grades. This plan was presented to the voters in 1995, but failed the referendum. The district has not recovered from this no vote by the public. It is still foundering on the issue of new space.

The Dr. William Mennies School was built in 1976; it is the newest of all the schools. Mennies was modeled after the open-classroom design. As was found, this model did not work. Fortunately, through the perseverance of the parent-teacher organization, permanent sound-deadening walls were installed that divided the quads into twins. This helped a great deal, although the building was still overcrowded. In the spring of 1996, Vineland was monitored by the state and failed in a few areas. The most important areas that failed were class size, substandard classrooms, and unapproved construction.

Several years ago, the Vineland School District adopted a Whole School Reform (WSR) model under the Abbott School regulations. WSR is a complete restructuring of an entire school district, putting in place a series of programs and strategies. These regulations enable students in Abbott School Districts to achieve the Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS) (Abbott V. Burke 153 NJ 480). For WSR to be effective, it must be a tightly woven system where all efforts are integrated and aligned and are headed in the same direction. Fragmentation and the continuation of divergent programs are not acceptable. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the district central office to ensure that effective principals lead schools and that school management teams (SMTs) are operating properly. SMTs may require assistance from the central office in thinking through how current program resources can be reallocated to support the comprehensive model they have chosen.

For the 2002-2003 school year, the district's budget is \$150 million. Of this budget, 80% comes from state sources, 17% from local taxes, and 3% from federal taxes.

The Vineland School District is comprised of two preschool sites; four kindergarten centers, which run on full-day schedules; and seven elementary schools, which range from first through fourth grades. Each of these buildings varies in size; Dr. Mennies is the largest and Maurice Fels is the smallest. The school system has four middle schools, which house fifth through eighth grades. These four buildings funnel into the 9-10 High School. The students then attend the 11-12 Senior High School for their remaining 2 years. The district rents several buildings to house its two alternative program sites and one adult education center. The total enrollment for the district is 9,477 pupils.

The Vineland Board of Education employs approximately 1,840 people. It offers a variety of special programs for children. Each of the elementary and middle schools offers a before and after school program. Remedial instruction is offered to those who fail the language arts or math portions of the standardized exam. From grades 1 through 8, the basic skills teachers assist students in remediation. At the high school level, students are scheduled for remedial HSPT classes as part of their daily schedules. Vineland offers a two-level “gifted” program. The academic students are those who score in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Terranova standardized exam. These students are pulled from their regular classroom setting during either math or language arts and instructed by a gifted teacher. The enrichment students are those who score in the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile on the Terranova standardized exam. These students receive instruction within the regular classroom setting with the classroom teacher providing challenging assignments and enrichment activities. Elementary, middle, and high school students are given the opportunity to join many of the after school activities offered, including sports teams, foreign language clubs, chorus, fine arts, and many other academic programs.

First grade students are administered the Otis Lennon exam. Second and third graders complete the Terranova exam. Fourth graders take the Elementary School Proficiency Exam. Eighth graders complete the Grade Eight Proficiency Exam, and at the high school level, the HSPT is administered. Also at the high school level, the Scholastic Aptitude Test is offered. In 2001, the average verbal score was 476, and 484 was the average math score. The state's average is 499 for the verbal section and 513 for the math section.

Of the 564 students attending Vineland High School and Vineland Adult School during the 2001-2002 school year, 97% graduated. Of those graduates, 156 were honor students with a grade point average of 3.0 or above. Of those students accepted into institutions of higher learning, 29% went on to a 4-year college, while 44% chose a 2-year college. Additionally, 4.6% chose other post-secondary schools to attend, and another 5% volunteered for military service.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 was to inform the reader of the intentions and goals of the study. It served to outline the demographics of the community in which this study was conducted. The remainder of this thesis is organized as follows: Chapter 2: Review of Literature, Chapter 3: Design of the Study, Chapter 4: Presentation of Research Findings, and Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study.

## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

Concern about violence in the schools has made the study of conflict and conflict management an urgent matter for educators today. Mediation is one form of conflict management that is getting widespread attention in schools across America. Mediation involves a neutral third person, called a mediator, who assists the disputants in resolving their problem with the consent of all parties. It offers a risk-free way to settle disputes for the parties involved in the dispute. No agreement, no deal. Conflict is a normal, natural part of everyday life. However, unresolved and lingering conflict frequently leads to violence, interfering with productivity and the quality of life in schools and the community. Extensive data illustrate that instances of violence, including bias-related violence and disciplinary problems in schools around the country, are severely interfering with the learning environment of students.

The fact is schools are full of conflict. In fact, the frequency and severity of conflicts seem to be increasing, so that for the first time the category “Fighting, Violence, and Gangs” has tied for the number one position with “Lack of Discipline” as the largest problem confronting local public schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1994).

However, conflict is not the problem, it is part of the solution. When managed constructively, conflicts can:

- Increase achievement and long-term retention of academic material
- Increase the use of high-level cognitive and moral reasoning
- Increase healthy cognitive and social development

- Focus attention on problems and increase the energy to solve them
- Clarify identity, commitments, and values
- Clarify how one may need to change
- Release anger, anxiety, insecurity, and sadness
- Strengthen relationships by increasing one's confidence that disagreements can be resolved, keeping the relationship clear of irritations and resentments

To realize the dual goals of order/peace and high quality education, schools must manage conflict constructively. Students must be taught to become peacemakers through the following steps (Johnson & Johnson, 1995a, 1995b):

1. Create a cooperative context.
2. Teach students to understand the nature and desirability of conflict.
3. Teach students the problem-solving negotiation procedure.
4. Teach students how to mediate their schoolmates' conflicts.
5. Implement peer mediation programs.
6. Teach follow-up lessons to refine and upgrade students' skills in using negotiation and mediation procedures.
7. Repeat the above six steps each year from the first through twelfth grades.

Development of the Peacemaker Program began in the 1960s. It originated from research on integrative negotiations and conflict; social development of social interdependence theory; and training of thousands of elementary, secondary, and college students, faculty, and administrators in how to manage conflicts constructively. A



network of school districts began using the Peacemaker Program throughout North America, Europe, and several other countries in Asia, Central and South America, the Middle East, and Africa. Besides students, teachers, and administrators, delinquents, runaways, drug-abusers, and married couples in therapy have been taught how to manage their conflicts more constructively.

Through the interaction between theory, research, and practice, the Peacemaker Program has grown and developed and has been field-tested in a wide variety of school districts, countries, and cultures.

More than 12 studies on the effectiveness of the Teaching Students to be Peacemakers Program have been conducted (Johnson & Johnson, 1995e ; Johnson, Johnson, & Stevahn, 1995). The studies focused on peer mediation programs in elementary, middle, and high school settings. The programs were evaluated over a period of several months to a year. The schools were in urban and suburban school districts. Students varied from lower to upper middle class and were from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Mediators were drawn from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. The studies were carefully controlled field-experimental studies with high internal and external validity.

The findings of the research indicate that before training, students engage in conflicts daily and generally manage them through trying to win by forcing the other to concede or by withdrawing from the conflict and the other person. One of the teachers, in her log, stated, "Before training, students viewed conflict as fights that always resulted in a winner and a loser. To avoid such an unpleasant situation, they usually placed the

responsibility for resolving conflicts on me, the teacher.” Students seem to lack all knowledge of how to engage in problem-solving, integrative negotiations.

After the peacemaker training, students knew the negotiation and mediation procedures, retained their knowledge throughout the school year, and were able to apply the procedures to conflicts in school as well as non-classroom settings. When given the option, students engaged in problem-solving rather than win-lose negotiations. The number of discipline problems the teacher had to deal with decreased by about 60%; referrals to the principal dropped about 95%. The results further demonstrated that when the peacemaker training was integrated into academic units, not only did the students learn how to negotiate and mediate, they also achieved higher scores on tests of academic learning. Students developed more positive attitudes toward conflict and adults in the school.

Parents also perceived the Peacemaker Program to be constructive and helpful. Many parents whose children were not part of the project requested that their children receive the training the next year. A number of parents requested that they receive the training so they could use the procedures to improve conflict management within the family.

Most discipline programs depend on adults administering external rewards and punishment. Adults in the school monitor student behavior, determine whether or not it is within the bounds of acceptability, and force students to stop inappropriate actions. When the infractions are minor, the staff often arbitrate, “The pencil belongs to Mary. Jane, be quiet and sit down.” If that does not work, students may be sent to the principal’s office for a stern lecture about the value of getting along, a threat that if the

conflict continues more drastic action will evolve. If that does not work, time-out rooms may be used. Eventually, some students are suspended or expelled from schools. Such programs teach students that adults or authority figures are needed to resolve conflicts. The programs cost a great deal in instructional and administrative time and work only as long as students are under surveillance. Students are not empowered. Adults may become more skillful in how to control students, but students do not learn the procedures, skills, and attitudes required to resolve conflicts constructively in their personal lives at home, in school, at work, and in the community.

At the other end of the continuum are programs aimed at teaching students self-responsibility and self-regulation. Self-regulation is the ability to act in socially approved ways in the absence of external monitors. It is the ability to start and stop activities according to the situation. In interaction with other people, students have to monitor, modify, refine, and change how they behave in order to act appropriately and competently.

If students are to learn how to regulate their behavior, they must have opportunities to make decisions regarding how to behave and follow through on those decisions. Teachers and administrators can concentrate on instruction rather than control.

A number of recent research studies have found that executives in high level positions spend much of their time dealing with conflicts, and the more skillful they are at doing so, the more successful their careers. Because conflicts occur continually, and because so many people are so unskilled in managing conflicts, teaching students how to resolve conflicts constructively is one of the best investments schools can make. Once learned, conflict resolution skills go with students to every situation and every

relationship. Students do not have to manage every conflict constructively, but they should know how. Knowing how to resolve conflicts with skill will increase students' future academic and career success and improve the quality of relationships with friends, colleagues, and family.

There is no reason to expect, however, that the process will be easy or quick. The more years students spend learning and practicing negotiation and mediation, the more likely they will be to actually use the procedures skillfully both in the classroom and beyond the school door.

The rising incidence of violence in the schools has led numerous school districts to implement a wide range of costly safety measures, from purchasing metal detectors to hiring full-time security officers. Although such measures may limit violent acts in the schools, they do not attack the causes of violence and often serve only to move the violence elsewhere in the community. There is a growing, common sense consensus that the best way to handle violence in the schools and prevent its spread throughout the community is to defuse disputes before they turn violent.

Schools have attempted to manage interpersonal conflicts among students, teachers, and administrators using various models of discipline, such as referrals to the principal's office, detention, suspension, and expulsion. Yet, it does not appear that these methods teach the students the life-long problemsolving and conflict resolution skills they need to resolve conflict in a productive, non-violent way. Dissatisfaction with traditional processes established to settle disputes has led educators and others to try new ways of conflict resolution such as mediation.

Mediation as an alternative means of dispute resolution has been around in various forms since the 1960s. It received national attention in 1984 when the National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) was formed. NAME brought together educators and mediators working in neighborhood justice centers to consider how best to teach about mediation and conflict resolution.

Peer mediation programs as we currently know them began in the early 1980s with the help of community mediation centers. The most prominent of these programs, Conflict Managers, was introduced by the San Francisco Community Board for Policy and Training and has served as a model for others around the country.

The Conflict Managers program works at both elementary and secondary schools. Teachers are trained in mediation and conflict resolution skills so they can, in turn, train a select group of students to manage conflicts among their peers. The conflict managers receive 15 hours of training. The training emphasizes active listening, teamwork (student mediators work in pairs), and learning specific steps in the mediation process. Role-playing enables the students to practice before serving as mediators in their schools.

At the elementary level, trained mediators settle disputes on the playground. Peer mediators are trained to use this conflict resolution process:

- **Step in.** If you see a conflict brewing, introduce yourself and ask both parties if they want to solve their problem.
- **If they agree, go to the area designated for solving problems.** Explain and get agreement to the four basic ground rules: 1) Agree to solve the problem, 2) Do not call each other names, 3) Do not interrupt, and 4) Tell the truth.

- **Decide who will talk first.** Ask that person what happened and how he/she feels, repeating back what is said using active listening skills. Do the same with the other party.
- **Ask the first person and then the second person for alternative solutions.**
- **Work with the students to get a solution that they both think is good.**
- **After the agreement is reached, congratulate the parties and fill out a Conflict Manager Report Form (Davis, 1986).**

At the middle and high school levels, Conflict Managers suggests a more formal intervention process.

1. The conflict is referred to mediation by an administrator, teacher, or student.
2. Those students named in the referral are approached about the possibility of using mediation to resolve their dispute.
3. If students mutually agree to follow the procedures for mediation described by the student mediator, the session takes place in a special room set aside for mediations (Burrell & Vogl, 1990; Davis, 1986).

An important element of the mediation process is that the disputants are not forced into mediation; it is up to them to decide if they want the mediator's help. The mediators are trained to be a neutral third party, one that facilitates communication so that the disputants can find a solution to the conflict.

Principals of four schools using the Conflict Managers program jointly wrote a letter to the school superintendent praising the program and stating that "Conflict

managers make significant contributions to a calm, friendly atmosphere on the playground and in the school” (Davis, 1986).

Although research studies on the effects of peer mediation programs are few and their methods have not always been the best, current evidence suggests that peer mediation programs can have a positive impact on schools.

First, peer mediators of all ages are proving that they can successfully mediate conflicts. A vast majority of peer mediation programs report a resolution success rate between 80% and 95%, which reached about 90% of the time. Some studies have followed up on the disputes 2 weeks after the mediation, finding that a vast majority of the resolutions remained successful (Burrell & Vogl, 1990; Crary, 1992; Johnson, 1994).

Second, student mediators benefit as they develop better interpersonal skills. Not only do they gain important mediation and conflict resolution skills, but they also seem to become more responsible and acquire better communication skills. Some get a boost in self-esteem.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as a result of peer mediation programs, many schools have seen a reduction in overall suspensions and a reduction in suspensions specifically for fighting. For example, suspensions for fighting decreased between 45% and 70% at five New York City high schools during the first year of a peer mediation program (Lam, 1989). A high school in Minneapolis reported similar results, with overall suspensions decreasing by 55% and suspension specifically for violent behavior decreasing 52% (Conbere, 1994).

Although there are many important dimensions to consider when developing and implementing a peer mediation program, three elements appear to be vital to a good

program: 1) good mediation training, 2) a mediation team that represents the student body, and 3) strong staff support.

In 1998, the counselors at Stealth High School in Seattle, Washington, decided to take a big step: to expand their peer mediation training program, begun in 1992, to the entire school so that all students would have a fundamental understanding of conflict resolution skills and an awareness of the program. The goals of the project were to develop understanding of cultural differences, respect for every student, responsibility for behavior, and effective conflict resolution skills throughout the student body. Stealth counselors and trainers from the CRU Institute, a non-profit organization specializing in school mediation and multicultural programs, have worked together to develop a school-wide conflict mediation program.

Starting in 1998, CRU trainers began training all freshman students at Stealth in conflict mediation skills and techniques. By 2002, the fourth year of the project, the entire student population has had conflict mediation training. The training, a shortened version of CRU's peer mediator training, emphasizes "being your own mediator" and resolving your own disputes in a respectful manner. These are primary goals for the whole-school project.

After 8 hours of training, 25 students are selected from a list of freshman volunteers to receive an additional day of training. These students become peer mediators for other students in the school.

A study of the Stealth program indicates that whole-school conflict mediation training has a positive effect on students' assessment of their knowledge of conflict resolution strategies and of their ability to communicate and to help solve conflicts.



Further, students' perceptions of their sensitivity to others who are different from them significantly increases.

The most significant effect of the program, says Sandy Fujita, Stealth counselor, "is on the students who become mediators and who have helped to train future freshman classes. These mediators are not necessarily high academic achievers, but they have discovered through mediation training that they have certain skills they didn't know they had. Mediators have repeated experience seeing the change in people who come to mediation."

Whole-school conflict mediation is not a program that students and faculty go through and instantly change; it is a process that develops growth and understanding for those who practice it. The program helps young people feel more secure so that ridicule, put-downs, bullying, and harassment will not be everyday occurrences in schools. Strengthening respect and understanding of others who are different and developing responsibility for one's own actions is an ultimate goal one can achieve.

There is anecdotal evidence that students transfer the mediation techniques learned in school to settings beyond the classroom. Students have reported using their mediation skills to resolve disputes at home with their siblings and in their community with peers (Johnson, Johnson, & Dudley, 1992). Both mediators and disputants benefit from the mediation training and conflict resolution process. Students who are taught the skills of mediating disputes learn political skills, which can be used beyond the classroom. Student mediators learn to listen effectively, summarize accurately, and think critically. Further, they develop skills on how to solve problems, to lead, to write, and to foster meaningful discussion among disputants. Since mediation seeks to solve a dispute

and prevent its recurrence, student mediators learn to plan for the future. They learn about responsibilities as well as rights, about consequences as well as choices.

Disputants involved in mediation also learn many of these same lessons. More importantly, maybe for the first time in their lives, they learn non-violent ways that they can choose to resolve their conflicts. They learn that they can succeed at resolving conflicts peaceably, that they can resolve problems without resorting to violence. They also develop a capacity to empathize with others.

The conflict resolution program mentioned above has helped to improve the climate in school, community, and juvenile justice settings by reducing the number of disruptive and violent acts in these settings; by decreasing the number of chronic school absences due to a fear of violence; by reducing the number of disciplinary referrals and suspensions; by increasing academic instruction during the school day; and by increasing the self-esteem and self-respect, as well as the personal responsibility and self-discipline, of the young people involved in these programs. Again, conflict resolution education encompasses problem solving in which the parties in dispute express their points of view, voice their interests, and find mutually acceptable solutions. Conflict resolution education programs help the parties recognize that while conflict happens all the time, people can learn new skills to deal with conflict in non-violent ways.

## Chapter 3

### Design of the Study

#### Introduction

Concern about violence in schools has made the study of conflict and conflict management an urgent matter for educators today. Mediation is one form of conflict management that is getting widespread attention in schools across America. Mediation involves a neutral third person, called a mediator, who assists the disputants in resolving their problem with the consent of all parties. It offers a risk-free way to settle disputes for the parties involved in the conflict. No agreement, no deal. Conflict is a normal, natural part of everyday life. However, unresolved and lingering conflict frequently leads to violence, interfering with productivity and the quality of life in schools and the community. Extensive data illustrate that instances of violence, including bias-related violence and disciplinary problems in schools around the country, are severely interfering with the learning environment of students. The rising incidence of violence in schools has led numerous school districts to implement a wide range of costly safety measures from purchasing metal detectors to hiring full-time police officers. Although such measures may limit violent acts in the schools, they do not address the causes of violence and often serve only to move the violence elsewhere in the community. There is a growing, common sense consensus that the best way to handle violence in the schools and prevent its spread throughout the community is to defuse disputes before they turn violent. Schools have attempted to manage interpersonal conflicts among students by various models of discipline, such as referrals to the principal's office, detention, suspension, and

expulsion. Yet, it does not appear that these methods teach the students the problem-solving and conflict resolution skills they need for life to resolve conflict in a productive, non-violent way. Dissatisfaction with traditional processes established to settle disputes has led educators to try new ways of conflict resolution such as mediation. The intern wanted to teach children strategies in which students help resolve conflicts among their peers. Students apply peer mediation strategies to help keep minor conflicts from escalating into more serious problems. The Superintendent, Assistant Principal, and Principal encouraged the implementation of peer mediation groups within the school. The intern gathered data on existing programs, attended peer mediation training, and visited an elementary, middle, and a high school that each utilizes a peer mediation program.

#### General Description of the Research Design

The intern used a case study design using a peer mediation team and a daily log of meetings. Teams of students were trained for 3 days at the Vineland Board of Education office and were also coached by mediators from the high school level. The school staff for peer mediation referred students. The students were given passes instructing them of the date, time, and destination. The mediators gathered their items, reviewed the upcoming situation, and prepared for mediation. The intern only intervened when necessary. The sole mediators were trained team members. The mediators completed a behavior contract that all parties agreed upon, and all present in the mediation signed the contract. The intern documented all mediations and necessary information in a log. Finally, the intern surveyed students who participated in peer mediation. The teachers were also interviewed shortly after mediation. The purpose of these surveys and

interviews was to collect data from the students' and teachers' perspectives. The students had the opportunity to share the effectiveness of the mediation session. The teachers were given the opportunity to share their observations on how student behavior has changed since mediation.

### Development and Design of the Research Instrumentation

The research instrumentation was developed to collect accurate and reliable data on the effects of peer mediation on student behavior. A student survey, student interview, teacher interview, and administrative interview were the four data collection instruments developed by the intern to complete this task.

The student survey (Appendix A) was designed to obtain information on how the students felt about participating in a peer mediation session. The survey used a questionnaire format and contained both selected-response items and an open-ended item. There were seven selected-response items which used the Likert scale. The possible responses were Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The survey also contained one open-ended response item. The students were able to complete the survey in about 5 minutes.

In addition to the student surveys, the teachers were interviewed. All participating teachers whose students participated in a mediation session were interviewed at each teacher's convenience, usually after school. To make sure the experience was still fresh in their minds, the interviews were scheduled within 2 to 3 days of the completion of the mediation.

The interview gave the teachers a chance to reflect on student behavior after the mediation. In general, the interviews allowed the intern to gain more specific and

detailed information on how and why peer mediation was perceived as beneficial to positive behavior. The interview took about 10 to 15 minutes.

Seven standard questions were used for the student survey. The intern followed up these questions with more questions, which depended on the response given by the participant. The standard questions for the students' interview were:

1. The peer mediators listened to me and understood my problem.
2. The peer mediators gave me enough time to talk things out and better understand the problems I was facing.
3. The peer mediators helped me to solve the conflict.
4. The peer mediators treated me with respect.
5. The peer mediators did not judge me or make fun of me.
6. The peer mediators helped me to understand ways to solve conflicts.
7. I would try peer mediation again. Why or Why not?

#### Description of the Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The population sampled for this research were students from Mennies Elementary School in Vineland, New Jersey. The participants were in traditional, bilingual, and special education classrooms ranging from first to fourth grade. The students used in the study were recommended to partake in a mediation session either by their teacher, administration, classmates, other staff members, or themselves. All students participating in a mediation session served as the primary data-gathering instrument in the research. Each student was surveyed and interviewed shortly after the mediation session. The intern also interviewed the teachers of those students who participated in mediation. Several approaches were used to determine if peer mediation improved the climate in the

school and the community by reducing the number of disruptive and violent acts. The intern was able to determine if fewer students were being referred to the Assistant Principal. Feedback from teachers, students, and parents were also used in determining the program's effectiveness. Students who participated in the mediation evaluated the program through an evaluation form.

#### Description of Data Collection Approach

The research instrumentation previously discussed was used to collect data for this study. The data for this research were collected through a daily log of all meetings; feedback from teachers, administration, parents, and students; and evaluation forms from those students involved in a peer mediation session.

The intern gave the students about 5 minutes to complete the survey several days after the mediation session took place. The intern for evaluation, then collected all surveys. The intern then met with students' teachers who participated in mediation for evaluation of student behavior. Interviews with students were then completed by the intern 2 to 3 days after a mediation session. Following the interview of students the intern kept detailed notes of the participants' responses. The individual students were interviewed separately to ensure that discreet opinions and responses were given.

#### Description of Data Analysis

The intern examined the findings presented by a peer mediation program to determine the effectiveness of a peer mediation team for character building and positive conflict resolution strategies. The analysis derived from information collected from student evaluation forms and feedback from teachers, students, parents, and administrators. The intern documented a daily log of all meetings. This enabled the

intern to determine the frequency of specific students who were referred to peer mediation. The intern then reported the analysis of the program to the school management team, which then discussed further implementation or modifications for the next school year. The intern believes peer mediation instilled the strategies needed to resolve conflicts in non-violent ways, increasing self-esteem, self-respect, and the personal responsibility of self-discipline.



## Chapter 4

### Presentation of Research Findings

#### Introduction

The results of the peer mediation survey are presented next in Table 1. The survey items and response scales are included in Appendix A. Total scores were computed for each survey item and for each section. Response scores range from 0 to 11 and correspond to the following: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

Table 1

#### **Peer Mediation Survey 02-03**

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 The Peer Mediators listened to me and understood my problem.	18	8	0	0
2 The Peer Mediators gave me enough time to talk things out and better understand the problems I was facing.	19	6	1	0
3 The Peer Mediators helped me to solve the conflict.	16	10	0	0
4 The Peer Mediators treated me with respect.	17	9	0	0
5 The Peer Mediators did not judge me or make fun of me.	23	2	1	0
6 The Peer Mediators helped me to understand ways to solve conflicts.	18	8	0	0
7 I would Try Peer Mediation again.		22	4	

### Defining Program Success

Several approaches were used to determine if peer mediation would improve the climate in the school and community by reducing the number of disruptive and violent acts. The intern used teacher, student, administrative, and parent feedback as one technique to determine if less referrals were being administered. The intern documented and kept a daily log of all meetings, which enabled the intern to determine the frequency of specific students who were referred to peer mediation. Also used in determining the effectiveness of the program was an evaluation form. Students who participated in a peer mediation session completed a survey that allowed them to evaluate the program and comment on the desire to participate in future mediation sessions if necessary.

### Participants' Perceptions of Peer Mediation

Several days following a peer mediation session, each participant was asked to complete a program evaluation form. In general, the results suggested that Mennies Elementary School is making some effort and showing some progress with the use of a peer mediation program for conflict resolution.

Several responses indicate no desire to participate in mediation. However, when those participants who did not wish to participate in mediation again explained why, a misunderstanding of the question was evident. These participants believe they will get along in the future and therefore there is no need for mediation. Detailed results for each of the sections of the peer mediation survey can be found in Appendix B.

Totals for each question are shown in Appendix B.

Overall, the total scores indicate the following strengths:

- The participants believed that the mediators listened and understood their problems.
- The mediators gave the participants enough time to talk things out and better understand the problem(s) they were facing.
- The mediators did not judge the participants.
- The mediators helped the participants discover strategies to solve conflicts.

Two of the questions on the survey indicate strength of the program by responses of Agree. However, these questions did not indicate as strong a belief as the above responses; in particular, “The peer mediators helped me to solve the conflict” and “The peer mediators treated me with respect.” The participants appear to believe the parties involved in the actual conflict are the ones responsible for resolving the conflict, not so much the mediators. They believe the mediators were there as listeners. The majority of participants, when asked, agreed to participate in a mediation session again, if necessary. In particular, participants responded mediation helped them solve problems before fighting occurred and mediation helped them talk their problems out instead of being violent. A small number of participants would not try mediation again. In particular, the participants believed they would not be in trouble again and they were very nervous. Furthermore, the results suggested that students participating in peer mediation are pleased with the results of the program and have gained positive conflict resolution strategies.

### Mediators' Perceptions of Peer Mediation

Following every mediation session, whether the coach was the intern or another teacher in the building, all mediators reported the results and the written contract to the intern. At this time, the intern discussed the peer mediation session with the mediators. If the intern was present for the session, the mediators and the intern would discuss "off the record" but confidentially the outcome of the session and what was to be expected in the future by the participants. On several occasions the mediators were leery and believed they would see the students in a repeated session in the future. On most occasions the mediators believed they really got to the root of a problem and felt the session was successful.

If the intern was not the coach for the session, the same procedure would follow mediation as the above example, however the mediators would update the intern with a brief description of the session.

Weekly, the mediators would meet to discuss any issues, suggestions for the program, or findings. Many of the mediators believed the younger the students were, the more difficult the mediation session. When asked to elaborate, the mediators felt the younger participants did not always listen to the mediators' rules and repeatedly interrupted each other during a session, no matter how often the mediator tried to remind the participants of the rules.

The mediators really enjoyed being part of the peer mediation program, and they believe it is beneficial. Several mediators expressed they wished peer mediation was available when they were in the younger grades and believe they resolve their own conflicts at home as well as in school using peer mediation techniques. Furthermore, all

mediators in the peer mediation program expressed an interest in being a peer mediator when they leave elementary school and proceed to middle school.

### Components of the Program

The intern used a case study design using a peer mediation team and a daily log of meetings. A team of students was trained for 3 days at the Vineland Public Schools Board office. The school staff for peer mediation referred students. They were given a pass instructing the date and time to discuss and assist in resolving conflicts with other students. The intern and other coaches only intervened when necessary. The sole mediators are trained team members. Finally, the intern documented all mediations and recorded necessary information in a log.

### Components' Effectiveness of the Program

A beneficial component of violence prevention is conflict resolution education. This component encompasses problem solving in which the parties in dispute express their points of view, voice their interests, and find mutually acceptable solutions. Conflict resolution programs help the parties recognize that while conflict happens all the time, people can learn new skills to deal with conflict in non-violent ways. The intern believes this program and all of its components improved the school climate in the school and community by reducing the number of disruptive and violent acts, by reducing the number of disciplinary referrals, and by increasing the self-esteem and self-respect, as well as the personal responsibility and self-discipline, of the students involved in the program.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

#### Introduction

The results of the peer mediation survey were presented to a focus panel comprised of the Superintendent, the Mennies Elementary School Principal and Assistant Principal, the school guidance counselors, and the school social worker. The intern interviewed the focus group to determine the effects of the study on Mennies Elementary School. The conclusions reached as a result of the interview, the implications of the study on leadership skills, and the implications of the study on organizational change are presented next.

#### Conclusions

The most pronounced areas of strengths determined by the peer mediation survey were presented to the focus group. The focus group addressed the survey results that suggested that peer mediators listened to and understood the problem(s) being presented. The group believed that the intense training of mediation, given by the board of administration, as well as the follow-up training given by the coaches for the peer mediators, plays an important role in developing strong mediators. The focus group also felt the selection of mediators by their past and present teachers has an impact on the program. The focus group suggested that good listening skills be a prerequisite for being chosen as a peer mediator.

The next area addressed was the amount of time allotted for mediation. All students who participated in mediation believed there was sufficient time to “talk out” their problems. The focus group agreed 20 to 30 minutes was an effective amount of

time. However, time became an issue for the mediation coaches. The Assistant Principal pointed out the scheduled mediation times that conflicted with coaches' teaching schedules. The intern raised this concern after the program was in effect for 4 months. To aid in the mediation process, the intern suggested other subject teachers with various teaching schedules be trained as coaches. The Principal agreed and sent three more teachers for training in February of this school year. The teachers sent for training were a fourth grade teacher, the school media specialist, and the art teacher. All trainees have different lunch and prep schedules, which will allow more flexibility when scheduling mediations. Finally, the group believed the coaches and the mediators needed to be extremely committed to the program, because of the sacrifice of lunch times and prep times.

The next area the focus group addressed pertained to the mediators' ability to create an understanding of ways to solve conflicts. The focus group believed this was the ultimate accomplishment for all parties involved in the mediation process. Both the intern and the Principal agreed the ability to solve conflicts in non-violent ways is a life skill that will affect students positively and hopefully has been instilled in students who can further practice this ability with future situations.

Next, the focus group addressed the amount of students who agreed and disagreed to participate in peer mediation. Although the majority agreed they would try mediation again, a small amount disagreed. The focus group reviewed the reasons for not wanting to participate in the mediation process. All of the reasons were students claiming they will not need mediation again, because they will not get in trouble again, and mediation taught them how to talk out their problems. The group suggested rephrasing the last

question on the survey, for example, “If you were involved in a conflict in the future, would you try another peer mediation session?”

The focus group strongly believed the areas of strengths determined by the peer mediation survey are accurate in regards to the conflict resolution programs of the district. The only concern was that the conflicting time schedule could possibly hinder the program. They expressed their belief that the positive elements of the conflict resolution program are evidence of the diligent work being accomplished by the Mennies coaches and mediators.

#### Implications of the Study on Leadership Skills

The intern gained valuable experience during many leadership opportunities available during this study. The intern supported the conflict resolution program with an attempt to improve school quality and student learning. The intern believed student learning to be the fundamental goal of schooling. Finally, the intern wanted to assess the exposure to resolve conflicts in non-violent ways students received and practiced. The intern understood the important role of peer mediation in promoting student learning and a safe school environment.

The literature review in this study outlined emerging trends and issues in conflict resolution programs to inform the school. The research conducted during this study was used to inform all active participants. The intern clearly communicated potential problems to participating parties. The active participants discussed the concerns and determined what action needed to take place to rectify any problems.



### Implications of the Study on Organizational Change

The findings of this study provide a snapshot of conflict resolution programs utilized throughout the district. Mennies Elementary School will take the results under consideration in the development of future conflict resolution programs. The focus group believed the survey provided insight as to how students perceived the mediation program.

Further, the focus group felt that there is always room for improvement. Scheduling will be a major factor in the school plan to improve the program. The focus group and the coaches all stated that they are committed to the quest of carrying out a peer mediation program. The results of this study will serve as a guide for the discipline planning committee's actions to strive for excellence.

### Further Study

In conclusion, the findings of this study provided insight into the school's discipline needs. The intern recommends further research to assess effective conflict resolution programs currently utilized to minimize violent conflicts in other similar school districts. Such an investigation may provide new ideas for the peer mediation program.

Additionally, due to time constraints of teacher schedules, mediations were conducted at inconvenient times for the classroom teacher. While a resolution was available to resolve the scheduling conflicts there is a need to train more coaches early in the school year.

Finally, the intern recommends adding a second focus group comprised of mediators and teachers. Mediators' and teachers' opinions should provide an additional perspective on the school's conflict resolution program needs.

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**Appendix A**  
**Student Evaluation Form**

**Student Evaluation Form  
Peer Mediation**

1. The peer mediators listened to me and understood my problem.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

2. The peer mediators gave me enough time to talk things out and better understand the problems I was facing.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

3. The peer mediators helped me to solve the conflict.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

4. The peer mediators treated me with respect.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

5. The peer mediators did not judge me or make fun of me.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

6. The peer mediators helped me to understand ways to solve conflicts.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

7. I would try peer mediation again.

Agree      Disagree

Why or Why not?

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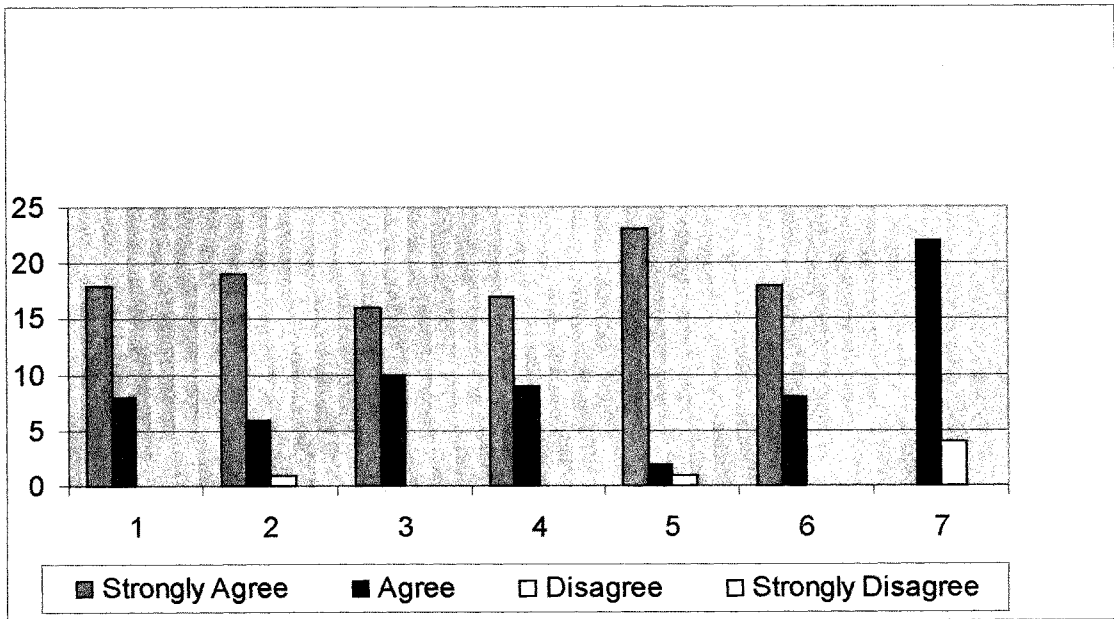
**Appendix B**

**Peer Mediation Survey Results  
02-03**

**Peer Mediation Survey Results  
02-03**

**Peer Mediation Survey 02-03**

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 The Peer Mediators listened to me and understood my problem.	18	8	0	0
2 The Peer Mediators gave me enough time to talk things out and better understand the problems I was facing.	19	6	1	0
3 The Peer Mediators helped me to solve the conflict.	16	10	0	0
4 The Peer Mediators treated me with respect.	17	9	0	0
5 The Peer Mediators did not judge me or make fun of me.	23	2	1	0
6 The Peer Mediators helped me to understand ways to solve conflicts.	18	8	0	0
7 I would Try Peer Mediation again.		22	4	



## Biographical Data

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