

**Summaries of Academic Articles Read for Research Paper and Policy Memo**

The Effects of a State-wide Conflict Management Initiative in Schools

Teachers perceived a moderate to great deal of change after the program's implementation (p 2). Conflict is an inevitable part of any collective activity or organization and people in conflict when actions of 1 interfere, obstruct, or make ineffective the actions of another (p 2). The two considerations here are value of goal and value of relationship between disputants (p 3). Since security measures like metal detectors fail to reach the root of the problem teaching conflict management may help address the root of problems.

Thus a peer mediation program was implemented in schools. This program trained students who then mediated when disputants were referred for peer mediation. This was seen as a powerful means of addressing sometimes-intractable violence in schools. 86% of teachers reported that students began using peer mediation and 54% of teachers said they referred students to peer mediation. Peer mediators are best if they are a diverse group and selectively assigned to specific cases for mediations to maximize effect. Sometimes it helps to train mediators who were once the offenders. Peer mediation is used as a means to reduce time spent in suspension. Administrative support is key and faculties need to see that peer mediation truly works in order to accept it. Peer mediation also needs to be acceptable in the student culture to be accepted as a form of conflict management. Training new mediators needs to be ongoing to sustain program as existing mediators graduate. Logistical challenges, like scheduling and space among others,

are roadblocks to establishing these programs in many schools. Students should be empowered to train others to feel that it is truly a peer mediation program.

The impacts of such programs are felt at a variety of levels (p 22). Teachers changed how they taught and saw change in student behavior. Schools witnessed school-wide changes in safety and climate. Ultimately this initiative was deemed a success.

#### Conflict Resolution Training as an Alternative to Suspension for Violent Behavior

Conflict management is in effect violence prevention (p 350). Research has shown that peer mediation programs are ineffective (p 350). More than half of violence is situational or relationship, and not tied to standard variables (p 350). Core premises and skills of conflict resolution are derived from the principles and practices of mediation (p 351). Goal of conflict resolution is find a solution where both parties get what they want and violence is avoided in the process (p 351).

#### Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Programs in Elementary and Secondary Schools: A Review of the Research

It is unknown whether these programs are needed or effective (p 459). Conflicts among students do occur frequently in schools (although the conflicts rarely result in serious injury). Untrained students by and large use conflict strategies that create destructive outcomes by ignoring the importance of their ongoing relationships. Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs do seem to be effective in teaching students integrative negotiation and mediation procedures. After training, students tend to use these conflict strategies, which generally leads to constructive outcomes. Students' success in resolving their conflicts constructively

tends to result in reducing the numbers of student-student conflicts referred to teachers and administrators, which, in turn, tends to reduce suspensions.

Violence and general lack of discipline biggest problem for schools these days (p 459). This has increased number of peer mediation programs in schools.

The origins of conflict resolution programs (p 460) have roots in four sources: researchers in the field of conflict resolution; advocates of nonviolence; anti-nuclear-war activists, and members of the legal profession. Research-based peer mediation began in 1960s w/ Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers Program. This derived from social interdependence theory and taught all students in the school mediation. Nonviolence-based peer mediation began in 1972 w/ a Quaker educational project in New York. The power of nonviolence is in justice... Anti-nuclear-war-based peer mediation programs began in 1985 w/ Resolving Conflict Creatively Program. Legal profession got involved through President Carter's Neighborhood Justice Centers in the 1980s.

There are 3 ways to classify these programs (p 460). The first is as either Cadre or Total Student Body (TSB) programs. Cadre emphasizes training a small number of mediators. TSB emphasizes training whole student body to manage conflicts constructively. The second is to divide programs into either curriculum-based programs teaching students about alternatives to violence and conflict in general or Peer mediation programs. The final classification method is to divide programs into either skills-oriented approaches that teach interpersonal and small group skills, or academically-oriented approaches that teach intellectual procedures

and cognitive skills for managing conflicts. Structural change approaches emphasize changing the school structure.

Peer mediation and other conflict resolution programs are often promoted as a way of reducing violence in schools (p 461). This is an example of practice being developed separate of research.

Have to understand conflicts well in order to manage them constructively (p 462). This is another place where peer mediation may well come in handy in place of other security measures, or even straight-up suspension.

There are 2 views of schools (p 466) that are relevant to how schools manage conflict: Schools are representative of our crime-crazy society; Schools are safe havens. You can see how one view will be more accepting of mediation than the other.

There are 2 contexts of conflict (p 470): Cooperative and competitive. Cooperative conflict states that conflict resolution seeks to restore; provides context that influences conflict resolution; communication is open and honest; accurate and constructive perceptions of others; trust and responsiveness with others; and recognizes legitimacy of the other person's interests. Competitive conflict is what most schools are dominated by; communication is generally avoided; frequent and common misinterpretations; distrust and exploitation between self and others; and denial of legitimacy of others' wants. However the strategy used to resolve is a better predictor of the outcome than the type of conflict (p 472). One measure of effectiveness for peer mediation programs is if the strategies students use to resolve conflicts change with the program in place (p 477).

Resolutions disputants reach can be divided into two sets of categories (p 483): Resolutions before or after training; and distributive or integrative agreements. Resolutions before training (p 483) leave most conflicts either unresolved or resolved in destructive ways. Here there is no difference between school and home. Resolutions after training (p 483) end up with over ¼ of the conflicts resolved in integrative ways. There is still no difference between school and home, but there are clear changes in the students' use of conflict resolution skills.

Discussion of peer mediation programs tends to oversimplify the mediator's role (p 485). Previous studies haven't seen significant changes in school climate after implementing a peer mediation program (p 488). But implementation of such programs does increase psychological health, self-esteem, self-regulation, and resilience in students and reduces the drop-out and suspension rates. Peer mediation programs have advanced significantly over the past decade (p 494).

### The Impact of Peer Mediation Training on the Management of School and Home Conflicts

It is crucial to note that the peer mediation program was put in place purely for this research project, and wasn't meant to survive far beyond it. Students from specific classes were trained as peer mediators. It was found that conflicts in school were different from those in home (p 829). Training significantly impacted strategies used and the resulting resolution (p 829). Peer mediation does affect the strategies used in conflict management (p 840). Elementary-aged children of either gender manage conflicts similarly (p 841).

Three Approaches to Coping with School Violence

Surveys had shown that the number of students who brought weapons to school was going up along side drug issues and death rates. There are three approaches to lower these problems: Crisis Management; Students taking responsibility (peer mediation); and the English curriculum.

With crisis management, a short-term fix, you would supervise students and mentally consider all of them potential threats. Schools will use metal detectors, hot lines for help, and higher penalties for crime. This approach can take place both after a conflict occurs and/or as preventative measures based on tips or rumors. On the surface this approach is more effective, but it doesn't alter systemic issues that may be the cause for violence.

Peer mediation is a form of conflict resolution that will empower the students to handle conflict resolution themselves; hence it is a long-term fix for school violence. The basic steps for a mediation session are: 1. The mediator(s) explain the ground rules on what each involved party (mediators plus the disputants) can and cannot do; 2. Each disputant tells their side of what happened without interruption; 3. The mediator(s) identify the issue and facts by summarizing each disputants' story and making sure everyone is on the same page; 4. The mediator(s) will help the disputants find possible solutions; 5. When a solution is found that is agreeable to all parties a document is written and signed that states the solution and what is to happen if it is not followed.

The English curriculum approach somewhat merges the previous two approaches. Think of examining a text in a book by talking about it, listening to other, reading, writing and reviewing it to make sure you understand it.

### Integrating Conflict Resolution Training into the Curriculum

Conflict resolution training has the potential to positively affect academic learning by equipping students with interpersonal skills that support a collaborative school environment and are conducive to academic and social success. You must teach excellent social skills to impart successful team building which is helpful in constructive conflict resolution. These social skills can include: Presenting ideas or positions; Listening; Communication; Understanding how to generate integrative solutions; and reaching mutual agreements on the best course of action.

Constructive conflict resolution training in the curriculum does not need new materials. The training will not use any classroom materials that have conflict in them. An example of applicable materials may be those from the social sciences.

Essentially you will need to make classroom conditions conducive to teaching, practicing, and using constructive conflict resolution skills by: Defining the conflict and teaching students how to identify concrete examples that exist in curriculum; Practicing conflict resolution by applying integrative negotiation and peer mediation procedures to resolve the curricular-embedded conflicts; Processing the effectiveness of each practice episode to plan for the future refinement; and applying the procedures and skills to constructively resolve actual conflicts that occur in classrooms and schools.

Classrooms and teachers help conduct relationships in small classrooms groups that can help accomplish knowledge, ideas, resource, and skills to complete tasks that are given. These cooperative conditions are necessary to any environment where constructive conflict resolution can occur.

There is a six-step integrative negotiation procedure that has been found to be the best procedure for this type of conflict management: 1. State what you want; 2. Express how you feel; 3. Give three reasons that understand your wants and feelings; 4. Communicate your understanding of the other person's wants, feelings, and reasoning; 5. Three plans or solutions to resolve the conflict; 6. Agreement with shaking hands to the solution.

In conflict that is in schools there are four steps to help diminish and end it: 1. End hostility between disputants-which often involve finding teachers, administrator or other adults supervisors to intervene; 2. Ensure commitment to the mediation process, which involves getting disputants to voluntarily participate in mediation as well as adhere to a set of ground rules; 3. Facilitate constructive negotiations, which involves leading the disputants through the six step integrative negotiation procedures; 4. Formalize the agreement, which involves writing and having disputants sign a new contract that specifies the resolution.

#### Implementing the 'Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers Program'

The 'Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers Program' trains every student in a school in the competencies they need to (a) resolve conflicts constructively and (b) make their schools safe places in which to learn. The program is directly based on the theory and research on constructive conflict resolution. More than 16 studies in



2 different countries have been conducted on the program's effectiveness. The evidence indicates that without training, children and adolescents tend to manage their conflicts in destructive ways. When given training, however, they learn how to engage in integrative negotiations and how to mediate their schoolmates' conflicts. They maintain their ability to do so months after the training has ended. They apply the learned procedures to actual conflicts in the classroom, school, and family settings. Learning the negotiation and mediation procedures can be integrated with academic learning in a way that enhances subject matter understanding.

People need to be exposed to positive models for constructive conflict management. They also need to be taught directly through the procedures and skills required to manage conflicts constructively. Classrooms are the best place to practice and teach this material.

There are two forms of teaching such material. The first, cadre, trains a small group of students to serve as peer mediators. This form is based on the assumption that a few specially trained students can defuse & resolve constructively the interpersonal conflicts taking place among members of the student body. The second form is training the entire student body in conflict management so they can all help each other constructively resolve conflicts.

This program deals with conflicts of interest that may exist when the actions of one person attempt to maximize his or her wants and benefits. Core concepts include: 1. Building a classroom; 2. Teachers and students having positive attitudes about conflict and a willingness to seek other ways of dealing with it; 3. Building awareness, resolving situations must know about goals and relationships; 4.

Cultural diversity-making sure all students can do this. 5. Practice the negotiation and mediation procedure- all students and staff; 6. Create a school wide discipline program focus on empowering students to regulate and control their own and their classmates actions.

To establish a cooperative context students need to put to the test long-term goals, mutual interest and engagement in problem solving negotiation to maximize joint outcomes. When used properly students will have better use of cooperative learning skills with results of higher achievement, better reasoning with more caring and supporting relationships, and better health.

Each student needs to understand the nature of conflict and look for the problem about to happen; choose an appropriate conflict strategy to achieve one's goal or maintain good relationships; and use negotiation to solve the problem, distributive-win-lose or forcing or integrative or problem solving.

There are six steps to this: 1. Describing what you want; 2. Describing how you feel; 3. Describing the reasoning behind your wants and feelings; 4. Looking equally at both your side and that of the other disputant; 5. Place their ways to resolve the conflict equally with your own; 6. Choose the wisest course of action and agreeing to it.

Students then must also know how to mediate other conflicts as a neutral person: Ending hostilities; Ensuring disputants are committed to the mediation process; Helping disputants successfully negotiate with each other; and formalizing the agreement.

There are five basic goals students need to master: 1. Master the basic negotiation and mediation procedures and models them competently; 2. Train students to negotiate and mediate; 3. Conduct the follow-up training to refine and upgrade students' skills in negotiation and mediation procedures; 4. Mentor the effectiveness; 5. Integrate negotiation and mediation training into academic lessons.

### References

\* denotes source not cited directly in POLS research policy memo

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