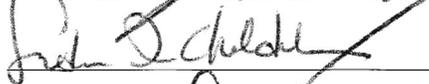CONFLICT RESOLUTION EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

by

Timothy G. Kennedy
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Science
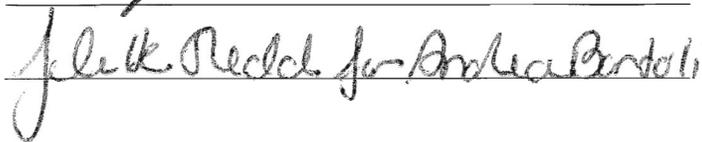Conflict Analysis and Resolution

Committee:

_____ Chair of Committee

_____

_____

_____ Graduate Program Coordinator

_____ Director,
Institute for Conflict Analysis
and Resolution

Date: _____ Fall Semester 2010
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Conflict Resolution Education: A Case Study Analysis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science at George Mason University

By

Timothy G. Kennedy
Bachelor of Arts
Franklin and Marshall College

Chair: Dr. Mara L. Schoeny, Assistant Professor

Fall Semester 2010
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife, Paige Valdiserri, who has not only supported my many long nights both in the classroom and in the office working on papers but was the inspiration behind the idea of bringing conflict resolution to the classroom. It is for all her support and inspiration that a tremendous debt of gratitude is owed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

CONFLICT RESOLUTION EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Timothy G. Kennedy, M.S.

George Mason University, 2010

Thesis Chair: Dr. Mara L. Schoeny

Research focusing on conflict resolution education (CRE) programs has established causal links between academic achievement and students who have received conflict resolution training in school. Conflict resolution education programs help students develop toolkits of conflict resolution skills such as communication, active listening, and problem solving skills in order to develop integrative approaches to conflict resolution based on cooperative negotiation and mediation procedures, as well as develop more positive attitudes towards conflict. Not only will implementation of such programs lead to higher academic achievement but will help students deal with conflict, both in and out of school, in a more positive and constructive manner.

The purpose of this research study is to understand how three specific conflict resolution education programs came into existence, how they were designed and implemented, and how they have been evaluated and sustained. With respect to the overall field of conflict resolution education, the goal will be to shed light on how and

why conflict resolution education came to be an important component of these three educational settings so as to provide insight into how the practice of conflict resolution education can be adapted to fit the needs of other educational institutions. Ultimately, the goal will be to provide justification for the expansion of conflict resolution education throughout the education sector, both domestically and globally, and to establish best practices in the design and implementation of new programs.

Analysis of the three programs will be based on the following central themes:

- Understanding the theory behind the conception of the program.

- Seeking to understand the development and implementation of the programs.

- Learning how the programs have been evaluated and sustained.

- Assessing how effective the programs have been in terms of the impact they might have made on the overall school climate and the extent to which correlations can be drawn between the operation of the programs and dependent variables such as academic achievement, communication skills, discipline referrals, suspension rates, school violence, and attendance/drop out rates.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

Violence in the form of war, poverty, discrimination, and the marginalization of particular ethnic groups based on race, class, religion, gender, sexual preference, and even age, plagues today's world. Violence can be found in the home, in the streets, in the community, and in institutions such as schools and the workplace. If school is a microcosm of society, then it is no wonder public schools in this country are beset by conflicts between students, between students and teachers, and even teachers and administration. Conflicts occur on a daily basis in the forms of harassment, verbal and physical abuse, fighting, and even gang-related violence, as well as biased or racist school policies that reinforce the status quo and lead to tension. They detract from the ability of students to maximize class time and focus on learning, therefore, from an administrative and instructional standpoint; time spent on discipline and classroom management hinders instruction and threatens academic achievement.

The root of the problem comes from the reality that many students come to school ill-equipped to deal with conflict in a constructive manner. 'Constructive' in this case refers to the concept of 'constructive conflict resolution' which suggests conflict can be dealt with in nondestructive ways that produce mutually beneficial outcomes (Kriesberg 1998). Whether it is through the family or through the neighborhood, many children

learn to deal with conflict by withdrawing, avoiding, or becoming hostile or aggressive through the use of force to coerce others. They learn to manage or resolve conflicts through a competitive, zero-sum approach that leaves little room for creative problem solving and positive outcomes. Ostensibly, it is becoming the responsibility of schools to provide the necessary type of conflict resolution training that will help students use integrative approaches to conflict management based on cooperation and mutual benefit. The field of conflict resolution education seeks to address this need by providing students with the tools to deal with conflict through a healthy, positive, and constructive approach.

Under the current Administration's version of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the primary goal of elementary and secondary education is to "ensure all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic standards" (No Child Left Behind Act 2001). This is accomplished through high-quality assessment and measuring progress against state standards, closing the achievement gap between high and low-performing children, and holding schools, local educational agencies, and states more accountable for improving academic achievement of all students. In addition, children should be provided with "an enriched and accelerated educational program, including the use of school wide programs or additional services that increase the amount and quality of instructional time" (Ibid.). The implementation of conflict resolution education programs can meet this need.

In addition to the goal of reaching proficiency on state tests, educators might argue the role of education is also to provide a foundation of skills in order to prepare students for entry into the labor force as productive and responsible citizens. If this is the case and schools really are a microcosm of society, a strong argument can be made that schools should provide opportunities for holistic development that take into account social, emotional, and cognitive development. One of the keys would be to teach students how to develop healthy relationships with peers and adults. Another key would be to teach students how to deal with conflict in a constructive manner. Research has established a causal link between academic achievement and students who have received conflict resolution training (Stevahn et al., 1996). The goals of reaching student proficiency and providing social and emotional learning should not be viewed as mutually exclusive but rather as a complement to one another. If schools were to provide conflict resolution training, not only would academic achievement increase but students would be able to develop healthier relationships and be able to deal with conflict more effectively both in and out of school. As schools and school districts focus on math, reading, and writing scores as measures of success, they should recognize conflict resolution education can and should be an important component of the curriculum that might contribute to that success.

B. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study will be to understand how three specific conflict resolution education programs came into existence, how they were designed and implemented, and how they have been sustained. With respect to the overall field of conflict resolution education, the goal will be to shed light on how and why conflict resolution education came to be an important component of these three educational settings so as to provide insight into how the practice of conflict resolution education can be adapted to fit the needs of other educational institutions. Ultimately, the goal will be to provide justification for the expansion of conflict resolution education throughout the education sector, both domestically and globally, and to establish best practices in the design and implementation of new programs.

C. Framework of Research Questions

The goal of the study will be to develop a holistic understanding of how these three CRE programs came into existence, how they were designed and implemented, and how they have been sustained. Research questions were designed around four central themes: theory, development, sustainability, and impact. They can be categorized as such:

- Understanding the theory behind the conception of the program.

- Seeking to understand the development and implementation of the programs.

- Learning how the programs have been evaluated and sustained.

- Assessing how effective the programs have been in terms of the impact they might have made on the overall school climate and the extent to which correlations can be drawn between the operation of the programs and dependent variables such as academic achievement, communication skills, discipline referrals, suspension rates, school violence, and attendance/drop out rates.

With respect to theory, questions focused on how the concept for the program originated and how it became institutionalized, as well as the program goals and objectives. In terms of program development, questions centered on the actual program model, how the idea gained traction with the staff, how supportive the program has been with faculty, staff, and particularly the administration, as well as students. Questions also inquired about how the curriculum has been designed and implemented. With respect to sustainability, questions focused on any evaluative procedures the programs might have undergone, as well as how the programs have been sustained, particularly if a 3 to 5 year plan has been developed. Last but not least, the effectiveness of the programs was measured in terms of their impact on overall school climate and correlations between the operation of the program and the dependent variables mentioned above. Participants were also asked to provide any qualitative or quantitative measures of success followed by recommendations for best practices.

II.   Literature Review

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the purpose of the literature review will be to "provide a framework for establishing the importance of the study as a benchmark for comparing the results with other findings" (Creswell 2003, 30). As will be discussed in greater detail in the following section, the author has chosen to employ a qualitative, multiple-case research design that will allow patterns and theories to emerge from participant information. The goal then will be to share the results of other related studies in order to "relate the study within a larger ongoing dialogue" as Creswell puts it from the work of Cooper and Marshall and Rossman (Ibid.).

The review of existing literature centered around the evaluation of the effectiveness of conflict resolution education and peer mediation programs and the methods of how conflict resolution training can be infused into school curricula, as well as both domestic and international case studies of particular conflict resolution education programs from multiple age groups. In addition, the impact of conflict resolution training on both students and staff with respect to overall school climate will be discussed, as well as a look at the relation of conflict resolution to related fields such as peace education, violence prevention, and social and emotional learning.

A study by Johnson and Johnson (1996a) focused on the rising concern about violence in schools, which accordingly prompted a rise in conflict resolution and peer mediation programs across the United States. According to data from the National Association for Mediation in Education (1994), conflict resolution programs increased

from 2,000 in 1992 to somewhere between 5,000 and 8,000 in 1994. The purpose of their study was to assess the impact of such programs. They began by exploring how the programs originated followed by a description of the various types of programs and how they were implemented, as well as how the evidence was used to validate effectiveness.

With respect to origin, they traced conflict resolution and peer mediation programs back to 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 programs began in the 1960s from social interdependence theory and the Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers Program, which sought to teach students the nature of conflict, how to use an integrative negotiation procedure, and how to mediate conflicts. Nonviolence advocates led by the Quaker Church established an educational project in New York City in 1972 named the Children's Creative Response to Conflict. The purpose was to teach nonviolence to children by focusing on how the principles of justice, caring, and personal integrity lie at the center of nonviolence.

Anti-nuclear-war activists established the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program through Educators for Social Responsibility in 1985. This program developed a curriculum based on intergroup relations, cooperative learning, and dispute resolution procedures, as well as peer mediation training. Along the same lines, members of the legal profession under President Carter's Neighborhood Justice Center developed the San Francisco Community Boards Conflict Manager Program which consisted of a conflict manager curriculum for training peer mediators in elementary schools. Its curriculum focused on the role of mediators and basic communication skills.

Johnson et al. classify conflict resolution programs into three categories: cadre or total student body, curriculum-based or peer mediation, and skills-oriented or academically oriented. Conflict resolution programs are either cadre, where a small number of students are trained to serve as peer mediators, or total student body, where every student is trained to manage conflict. Secondly, programs can either be curriculum-based, where students are taught about conflict and alternatives to conflict resolution and have a preventive aspect by developing social skills, empathy training, stress and anger management, attitudes about conflicts and bias awareness, or programs with only a peer mediation component. Lastly, conflict resolution programs can be skills-oriented, in which students are taught interpersonal skills and skills needed to resolve conflict, or academically oriented, where students are taught the intellectual procedures for managing conflicts. The authors also put forth a structural change approach that seeks to change the school structure by providing a cooperative environment to handle conflict.

The purpose of this article was to assess the effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs. The analysis focused on the nature of conflict in schools, the need to establish a cooperative context for conflict, and the strategies students use to resolve conflicts before and after training, as well as the outcomes that result when untrained and trained students resolve their conflicts. Using data collected from fourteen studies on the types of conflicts students face in school, the authors contend it is not so much the physical violence but other forms of conflict such as verbal harassment, arguments, and relationship issues that occur most frequently. In order to help students

deal with these conflicts more effectively, they recommend schools establish a cooperative environment, as opposed to a competitive one, in order to provide for open communication, constructive perceptions, and allow for conflict outcomes to be decided jointly. They contend competitive environments are characterized by poor communication, misperceptions, hostile attitudes, and encourage students to maximize their own gains at the expense of others.

With respect to outcomes, the authors point out that often the best predictors of how a conflict will turn out are the strategies the disputants use. Data from the studies indicated students without conflict resolution training were more likely to exhibit withdrawal or suppression of conflicts or use aggression in coercive manners, as opposed to students with training who are more likely to use reciprocation, cooperation, and rely on integrative negotiation procedures. In addition, the latter are more likely and better able to apply integrative procedures in nonclassroom and nonschool settings. For clarification, an integrative approach to negotiation is based on maximizing the gains of both oneself and the other, as opposed to a distributive approach which is based on the belief that gains for the other can be achieved only at one's own expenses, therefore, one's actions are aimed at maximizing one's own gains at the expense of the other (Johnson D.W. and Johnson F., 1997; Walton & McKersie, 1965).

Furthermore, with respect to outcomes of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, the data suggests students without such training are less likely to resolve conflicts than those that have been trained. 'Training' in this case is indicative of the type of strategy a student will use to resolve conflict. According to their research, the

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authors found untrained students relied more heavily on withdrawal/suppression, force/coercion, intimidation, and distributive negotiations as opposed to trained students who were more likely to resolve conflicts through integrative negotiation procedures. In terms of school climate, discipline problems and suspension rates were found to decrease and academic achievement gains were found with students who had received integrated conflict resolution training. The next article describes a specific program these same authors developed in order to address such concerns.

Since disciplinary issues in school interfere with learning and the use of traditional discipline models based on external rewards and punishments is only capable of controlling student behavior rather than empowering students, Johnson and Johnson (1996b) recognized the need to develop alternative school discipline models that encourage self-responsibility and self-regulation. The authors developed a comprehensive, school wide conflict resolution and peer mediation training program, the Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers program, which teaches negotiation and mediation procedures in an incremental fashion through a guided curriculum for grades 1 through 12. It is based on the premise that conflicts are not the problem but a part of the solution, thus, schools should strive to become 'conflict-positive' organizations. By this the authors mean schools should be places where conflicts are encouraged and managed constructively. The key then becomes teaching all students how to deal with conflict effectively so as to provide safe and healthy environments conducive for learning that will serve as a means of gaining valuable life skills that will transfer into home, career, and community settings.

In order to develop the self-regulation and responsibility mentioned above, the authors suggest students should be taught procedures for managing conflicts constructively and be given the opportunity to practice these procedures, as well as have a classroom structure that supports such measures. The five components of the program include creating a cooperative learning environment, providing an atmosphere that helps students develop a conceptual understanding of conflict, teaching the problem-solving negotiation procedure as well as the peer-mediation procedure, and allowing for frequent follow-up lessons to reinforce skills. They contend that if these measures are put in place and conflicts are managed constructively, students can increase academic achievement, develop higher levels of cognitive and moral reasoning, and will have increased levels of self-esteem and social development. In addition, students will be able to clarify issues of identity, release anger, anxiety, and resentment, and strengthen relationships by developing confidence in being able to resolve disagreements. The next section deals with the effectiveness of a conflict resolution program in a rural K-8 public school in Ontario, Canada.

Stevahn et al. (1996) analyzed the impact of context on the effectiveness of a conflict resolution program in a Canadian middle school. Integrative conflict resolution training was provided for half of the seventh and eighth grade students in an academic English literature unit. With respect to methodology, half of the students were taught in a cooperative learning environment while the other half were taught in an individualistic learning environment. The focus of the study was to examine whether the conflict resolution training was effective and assess the impact of the context on the effectiveness

of the program, as well as determine whether or not a causal link could be drawn between the training program and academic achievement.

Analysis of the study focused on four assessments: whether the training itself was effective in that students were able to learn an integrative negotiation procedure, whether the students were able to apply the procedure to real-life conflict situations, and if the training resulted in more frequent use of integrative negotiation procedures, as well as student attitude towards conflict. Students who received the training were able to learn the integrative approach to negotiation. Furthermore, untrained students were shown to rely more on withdrawal strategies during exercises in conflict, whereas trained students were shown giving consideration to future relationships and using compromising techniques to resolve conflicts. Since trained students showed more frequent use of integrative approaches, the authors suggest this type of training is evidence that negotiation behavior of youth can be effectively modified. Last but not least, there were no significant differences in negative attitudes between trained and untrained students but trained students displayed more positive attitudes towards conflict than did untrained. The significance of this last finding can be shown in the following quote, "Viewing conflicts as positive is hypothesized to increase the likelihood that conflicts will be faced and resolved rather than avoided and suppressed" (Stevahn 1996, 819). Based on their evaluation, the authors conclude the overall training program was successful.

In addition to the Canadian study, Stevahn et al. (2000) assessed the effectiveness of a conflict resolution training program conducted in an American Midwestern suburban elementary school as well. Eighty kindergarten students were taught a four-week unit on

friendship. Students in the experimental group received nine hours of conflict resolution training integrated into the curriculum unit, whereas the control group was given the same lesson without the training. The purpose of the study was to measure retention of conflict resolution procedures, the extent to which students could apply the procedure in conflict situations, and the conceptual understanding of friendship.

Results indicated kindergarten-age children are capable of learning an integrative approach to conflict resolution and can transfer this knowledge to conflict situations outside of the classroom. This study also showed integrating conflict resolution training into an academic unit, in this case on friendship, can make the curriculum more meaningful and increase academic achievement. Lastly, the results confirmed conflict resolution training can and should be given to the entire student body rather than a select few, which is usually the case for peer mediation programs. Moving from conflict management to deeper issues of violence, the next article focuses on the extent to which conflict resolution programs are able to deal with the fundamental issues of violence prevention.

Bretherton (1996) noted the rising level of violence in her Australian community led to the implementation of conflict resolution programs in schools. She examined the extent to which these programs were able to deal with the fundamental issues of violence prevention and how such programs might best be designed to meet this objective. With respect to program design and implementation, she focused on where it might be best located, the age groups that would benefit the most, and appropriate teaching methods, as well as evaluation. Her article reviews research on the process of growing up to be

violent, reviews a typical conflict resolution program, and provides strategies for building conflict resolution programs that address the issue of violence in greater depth.

Although students in the Dealing With Conflict program, a course designed for senior secondary students, reported decreased levels of violence, Bretherton found the course to be ineffective in challenging deeper attitudes toward gender and aggression. A second program entitled "After" was created to address gender issue. The participants included third-year college students and children ranging in ages from 5 to 12 in an after school care center. Observations confirmed the research literature on violence that gender bias is a critical factor and that conflict resolution skills should be taught in a way that recognizes the impact of social structures on group response. She argues a link should be made between conflict resolution and theories of nonviolence, which would entail "shifting conflict resolution from a bag of techniques to a philosophy of relationships" (Bretherton 1996, 126).

Bickmore (1997) believes a critical function of school is to help students move beyond the conflict resolution approaches they find in their neighborhoods. She believes that if conflict is infused into learning opportunities, students can practice how to deal with its resolution or management and become more effective nonviolent actors. One way to do so is through special training sessions that focus directly on conflict resolution skills while another way is through integration of conflict resolution opportunities into academic coursework.

A qualitative study of both curricular and extracurricular approaches was performed in the United States. The former took place in two high school science

classrooms, the latter in a peer mediation training program called Anti-Violence after school. Although the author concludes conflict can be brought into public schools as a learning opportunity, she does acknowledge the limitation of the study in that it was only capable of documenting students' engagement in the learning processes rather than retention of behavioral outcomes.

Her two main findings were that meaningful conflict resolution learning is more difficult if students are not actively engaged in the conflict and that this learning can affect the way they understand the social environment. Even though the Anti-Violence program gave students direct practice with conflict management and developed their capacity to serve as models of nonviolent conflict resolution, the program was not able to address the depth to which an academic subject's curriculum can go. The infusion of conflict resolution into a social studies curriculum showed that traditional classrooms can also be worthy vehicles for helping students practice and learn conflict resolution in meaningful ways. The next article analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of peer mediation and makes recommendations as to how schools might design comprehensive conflict resolution programs to bring about productive change and cultural transformation.

The author, Elenie Opffer, worked as a mediator, consultant, and trainer for the San Francisco-based Community Board Program from 1983 to 1995. Her work with school systems exposed her to alarming levels of violence, as well as segregation and intergroup tension. Although peer mediation programs were created to deal with such problems, the author suggests more comprehensive measures need to be put in place in

order to deal with the deeper issues of interracial tension, gender bias, and youth violence. She admits a growing recognition of peer mediation took place during this time but also points out a concomitant growing frustration with respect to interracial tension among the various student populations.

Using a case study approach, Opffer (1997) analyzed several peer mediation programs and found they had several benefits. For instance, the procedure itself establishes a neutral environment for students to discuss their conflicts and resolve their problems in a way that allows them to take responsibility for managing their interpersonal issues. Mediators learn the dynamics of conflict and how to manage it constructively. They learn problem solving steps, effective listening and speaking skills, and how to work cooperatively. They have also been able to transfer these skills outside of the classroom. In terms of outcomes, school administrators reported a reduction in discipline referrals, disciplinary actions, and student fights. Although these programs have a number of benefits, they also have limitations.

The knowledge and skills developed through peer mediation training is mainly limited to the mediators themselves, although disputants can benefit to a certain extent from exposure to the process. For the most part, it is the mediators themselves who reap the benefits of training. According to the author, the rest of the student body must rely on the mediators to solve their problems. Furthermore, she found when school-wide conflict resolution programs complement mediation, the programs tended to focus on student behavior as the root of conflicts, as opposed to school policies or the actions of faculty and staff. Some critics went as far as accusing peer mediation of supporting

institutionalized racism. Opffer writes "they claim that the focus on student behavior allows adults who hold power in the school to continue practices that contribute to racism" (Opffer 1997, 47). To this end, peer mediation programming has not had any effect on school policy or pedagogy.

This begs the question as to whether it is fair to measure the effectiveness of peer mediation programs against their ability to change school policies or the impact they might have on providing a skill set to resolve conflict. With respect to the former, the author characterizes the programs she has evaluated into two categories: exemplary programs and problematic programs. Exemplary programs were able to transform the school into collaborative, problem solving communities and allowed greater participation in the resolution of problems. Problematic programs were used politically as disciplinary procedures to fix problem students and restrict potential for transformation. The author recommends a number of strategies for school transformation and the prospect of becoming exemplary.

In order to build exemplary schools and build stronger problem solving communities, schools should begin by implementing a peer mediation program and conflict resolution curriculum. In addition to students undergoing training, all staff including teachers and administrators should go through this training as well. Other strategies include prejudice and bias reduction education, cooperative learning, multicultural education, and collaborative group processes. The author recommends schools should develop long-term strategies, engage in collaborative planning by involving all stakeholders in the analysis, planning, and decision-making process, and

provide opportunities for professional development in the types of education mentioned above. "Once a school builds a solid foundation of effective processes for collaborative problem solving, it becomes easier to work as a team to dismantle inequitable educational structures and practices and move toward building effective intergroup relationships" (Ibid., 52).

Close and Lechman (1997) examine the issue of student empowerment and the need to include students in the development of conflict resolution programs. Using a case study of a program in Cleveland, Ohio, Winning Against Violent Environments Conflict Resolution Program (WAVE), the authors explore the benefit of training students to become peer mediators, as well as having them train other students and adults. According to their research, school-based conflict resolution programs are empowering for all students who participate whether it be as mediators or as disputants in a mediation as evidenced by the following quote, "The process of mediation is self-empowering in that it enables students to make decisions about issues and conflicts that affect their own lives" (Close and Lechman 1997, 150 quoting Maxwell 1989). Those who participate are able to resolve conflict without adult assistance and learn how to positively state what they need to resolve problems. They learn effective communication, decision-making, and negotiating skills. According to the authors, the key to empowering students is being able to provide opportunities to learn these skills.

On the opposite end of the spectrum from empowerment is a new form of abuse called adultism. Creighton and Kivel define abuse as restricting, controlling, humiliating, or hurting another. When adults decide what is best for students without consulting them,

they define this form of abuse as adultism. They contend teen violence, bullying, self-abuse from drugs and alcohol, unwanted pregnancy, and suicide are all forms of learned helplessness and hopelessness stemming from adultism. In order to combat this abuse, Close and Lechman advocate programs that teach students to become the trainers. These programs can use adults to train the students but for the conflict resolution methods to become part of the larger community, students need to be empowered. For instance, peer mediation programs empower students to provide a service to their school and peers whereby in the process of doing so their leadership skills increase and do does their ability to solve problems.

The WAVE program was developed in order to provide students with lifelong skills using a 'student as trainer model.' WAVE students train other students and adults in two conflict resolution processes. One is the formal mediation process for grades 6 to 12 and adults. The other is a conflict management process that can be used in the cafeteria, on the playground, and in the classroom for grades K to 5. Student trainers teach the lessons and conduct the trainings, particularly during the summer when students from various districts and regions attend workshops and conferences. "WAVE involves urban youth as positive change agents in their schools and in the field of conflict resolution" (Close and Lechman 1997, 13).

According to the authors, the skills student trainers acquire include public speaking, communicating, relating to difficult people, making decisions, developing confidence, and becoming conflict resolvers. In addition, this model provides students with the power to stop violence. With respect to the cooperative learning field, Johnson

and Johnson (1994) maintain when young people work together it helps create a forum for increasing conflict resolution skills. Furthermore, Giuliano (1994) suggests cooperative learning helps develop interpersonal skills, which is critical for meeting the needs of student populations who do not do well in traditional learning situations. The authors point out the WAVE program trainings provide cooperative learning, as well as hands-on, experiential learning that fulfills this need.

The success of the WAVE program has been measured from a qualitative sense using the feedback of the trainers themselves, particularly with respect to the impact of the mediation experience. The proven benefits of the program include training thousands to mediate, providing professional development opportunities, training students to provide service to their schools through training, conducting faculty and staff inservice, and facilitating parent and community meetings, as well as local, state, and national conferences. According to the authors, "Our experience with youth trainers has convinced us that it is an immensely successful approach to empowering young people. Student trainers are role models for the children and young people they work with…they have shown how urban high school students can be positive change agents and role models for others in the struggle against violence" (Close and Lechman 1997, 16). The next article builds on this theme of placing schools at the vanguard in the struggle against violence by advocating a comprehensive peace education, which incorporates conflict resolution, in order to challenge the status quo and lay the groundwork for coexistence.

The author, Benyamin Chetkow-Yanoov, in his capacity as Professor of Social Work, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel, has developed curriculum for teaching

conflict resolution in Israeli public schools. Under the premise that reaching personal maturity and learning skills for intergroup cooperation takes many years, he is a proponent of teaching conflict resolution in a systemic way from elementary school through the university level. "Social science contends human nature is not intrinsically violent or warlike" (Avruch & Black, 1990; Clark, 1990; Smoker, 1990). He contends that if we can be taught to be racist, sexist, Anti-Semitic, we can also be taught to trust, appreciate others, and cooperate, as well as learn to negotiate, mediate, and compromise in conflict situations. "Because the public schools have long helped socialize young persons into roles and attitudes considered essential for adult citizenship, formal education efforts must now prepare pupils, adults, and retired seniors for a nonviolent lifestyle within a framework of pluralism" (Chetkow-Yanoov 1996, 13).

The question becomes whether it is a function of schools to socialize students into the existing structural order of society or is it to teach students to challenge the social order? "If teachers and pupils learn to conquer situations of domination, oppression, and negative forms of dependence, we may learn to coexist with other people (regardless of sex, nation, race, or culture) who act similarly" (Ibid., 13). For the purpose of this article, the author has incorporated conflict resolution skills and techniques under the umbrella of peace education. He proposes a series of curriculum goals using a systematic approach to shape the learner's cognitive development from elementary school on up through the university level. His learning objectives include increasing knowledge about diversity, viewpoints, and ideology, understanding the influence of attitudes and feelings on human behavior, and analyzing the concept of peace as both a state of being and an active

process. Moreover, his goals seek to understand how power can be used to escalate conflicts and how nonviolent measures can be used to deescalate, how simulations can be used to develop conflict resolution skills, and, at an advanced level, how trust, relationships, and self-awareness can be built by bringing members of opposing political parties, religious orders, and racial/ethnic backgrounds together.

With respect to implementation, one example the author provided was using a series of chairs ("ear-chair", "mouth-chair", "friend-chair") in an elementary classroom in South Africa to resolve conflicts. Disputants sitting in the "ear-chair" must listen for two minutes while the other disputant sits in the "mouth-chair" as he or she explains his or her side. If the two disputants cannot come to a resolution on their own, a third party sits in the "friend-chair" to help them resolve the issue. Another example would be using language acquisition at the elementary and middle school levels to promote peacemaking. Using the premise that learning a new language helps students develop different worldviews, the author suggests schools should require students to learn two or three different languages. At the fourth grade level, peer mediation was introduced in a British Columbia classroom based on the work of the San Francisco Community Board.

At the junior high level, Jewish and Arab teachers, psychiatrists, and social workers developed educational materials on coexistence for Israel's Jewish and Arab students in the form of lessons, teacher-training workshops, and community workshops. At the high school level, the author developed lessons on trust, tolerance, and peaceful ways to resolve conflicts in order to combat the assumption that distrust, prejudice, and racism are learned behaviors. Last but not least, the author observed the rise in

accredited courses in peacemaking, conflict resolution, or both in a number of universities throughout North America, England, and Europe. The goal of this systemic approach is based on the assumption that "it is possible to educate all age groups toward greater psychological and political maturity" (Ibid., 24). The author contends the implementation of peace education should "press beyond the status quo, make plans to influence social policy, and strive for the emergence of well-informed public opinion" (Ibid., 25).

The purpose of this literature review was to situate the study within a larger framework. The research focused on evaluations of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, methods of how conflict resolution has been infused into school curriculum, and the impact of conflict resolution training on students and staff. In terms of effectiveness, results showed students with conflict resolution training were able to choose better strategies of dealing with conflict both in and out of school. Furthermore, students beginning at the elementary levels were able to learn and apply integrative approaches to conflict resolution. Comprehensive school wide programs such as the 'student as trainer model' were able to empower students and develop lifelong skills such as public speaking, communication, decision-making, developing confidence, and becoming conflict resolvers. With respect to staff, schools that were open to conflict resolution training were more likely to have cooperative learning environments and develop alternative school discipline models that encouraged self-responsibility and self-regulation. This research will be used as a point of comparison, particularly with respect to the focus on program models, impact on school climate, and dependent variables such

as academic achievement, discipline, and school violence. The next section will discuss the overall research design including the rationale for using a qualitative research strategy, site selection, and data collection methods, as well as strategies for data analysis.

III.   Design and Methodology

A. Qualitative Research Strategy and Rationale

According to Tellis, the case study approach using qualitative methodology was first employed in Europe but later reached the United States in the early 1900s as the University of Chicago's Department of Sociology found this particular method useful in studying social issues such as poverty, unemployment, and other conditions associated with the rising tide of immigration (Zonabend 1992). The use of the case study declined, however, as adherence to the scientific method and the use of quantitative measurements were given new emphasis. Even the field of sociology, which pioneered and even championed the case study paradigm, began to look for and depend on research with a more quantitative scientific methodology. Qualitative methodology, particularly the case study, would make a resurgence in the 1960s as limitations of the quantitative approach began to surface.

Given this brief history, the next step will be to define the parameters of a case study in order to select and apply the most appropriate approach for the purpose of this

research project. According to Yin (1994), a case study is a "strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence. He also says, "Case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" and "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin 2003, 1). According to Stake (1995), case studies are used when "the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time." Applications of case studies have been found in law, medicine, government studies, and the effectiveness of educational programs including High-Risk Youth Programs, community-based prevention programs and substance abuse prevention programs.

Case studies can either be single or multiple-case designs. Since they do not follow a sampling logic, they do not need a minimum number of cases nor do the cases have to be randomly selected. Yin (1994) is quoted in Tellis as saying "generalization of results, from either single or multiple designs, is made to theory and not to populations. Multiple cases strengthen the results by replicating the pattern-matching, thus increasing confidence in the robustness of the theory." He contends the significance of this methodology lies in the fact that it can cover both the process and outcomes because it uses both qualitative and quantitative data to explain the issues and conditions from the perspective of the "actors." Zonabend (1992) expands on this definition by saying, "The

case study is done by giving special attention to completeness in observation, reconstruction, and analysis of the cases under study" and that this approach incorporates the views of the "actors" involved. The next section will discuss why the multiple-case research design will be employed in this research project.

Since the goal of this project will be to provide insight into how the practice of conflict resolution education might be adapted to fit the needs of educational institutions by understanding how and why it came to be an important component of three educational settings, the most appropriate methodology will be the multiple-case research design. Given the limited number of cases where such programs are currently in existence, the methodology need not take sampling logic into account in order to be able to draw generalizations. The fact that multiple-case studies do not use random sampling does not constitute a problem for Yin. Critics argue such designs lack the sufficient numbers of cases to draw generalizations but he contends the goal of case study research should be to establish parameters and apply them to all facets of the research. Yin (1989) states, "General applicability results from the set of methodological qualities of the case, and the rigor with which the case is constructed." In order to satisfy the rigor he is referring to, case studies should carry out the three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding, and explaining. The next section will expand on the justifications for using the multiple-case design.

The purpose of this project is to provide a broad, holistic understanding of conflict resolution education programs. The "quintessential characteristic of case studies is that they strive towards a holistic understanding of cultural systems of action" (Feagin, Orum,

& Sjoberg, 1990). The cultural systems of action refer to "sets of interrelated activities engaged in by the actors in a social situation" (Tellis 1997, par. 27). Accordingly, the research design should give the researcher the opportunity to study the programs in context in order to build a theoretical perspective and draw generalizations. Since this project is focused on a particular phenomenon, conflict resolution education programs, a descriptive approach will be used that will allow the researcher to describe the events by studying the processes and outcomes as they have unfolded in context. Druckman (2005) uses the term "focused comparisons" and contends patterns and best practices will emerge through such a methodology that allows the researcher to look for indicators of success or effectiveness in particular programs. The next section will discuss how theory will be incorporated into the study.

Creswell classifies the use of theory in qualitative research into the following three strategies: one, as a broad explanation or generalization, in most cases to explain behavior or attitudes, two, as a theoretical lens or perspective to guide the study, or three, as an end point or grounded theory. Since this study is concerned with deriving meaning from participant observation and documentation, the strategy of inquiry will be to use the latter case, in which theory is used as an end point. Creswell explains the use of grounded theory as an attempt by the researcher "to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants in a study" (Creswell 2003, 14). Furthermore, Strauss & Corbin (1998) state, "Inquirers hope to discover a theory that is grounded in information from participants." This inductive approach begins with the researcher gathering information by asking open-ended questions and

then analyzing the data to find themes, generalizations, or broad explanations, which are then compared with personal experience and existing literature. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to the end point as "pattern theories" and explain that they develop during qualitative research and represent interconnected thoughts or parts linked to a whole.

Justification for this type of research design was validated by the fact that most of the studies from the literature review used a form of case study methodology as well. For example, one study took place in a K to 8 public school in Ontario while another took place in a suburban elementary school in the United States with the goal of measuring the impact of context on effectiveness of conflict resolution programs. Most of the studies utilized a single case design to measure the effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation training on student outcomes or the impact of such training on overall school environment. This study will also seek to explore how conflict resolution education impacts school climate, as well as a number of dependent variables such as academic achievement, communication skills, discipline referrals, suspension rates, school violence and drop out rates. Particular attention will be paid to program development and sustainability. Using Druckman's concept of "focused comparisons," patterns and theories will hopefully emerge from the three case studies in order to develop a set of best practices.

B. Site Selection

The purpose of this study was to develop a holistic understanding of how conflict resolution education programs operate. Once the decision to employ a multiple-case study design was made, the next step was to identify three educational institutions that had such a program. Research was conducted through an informal network of conflict resolution practitioners with knowledge and familiarity to such programs to help identify potential locations of study. The main variables in terms of selecting sites were the availability and accessibility of the program and associated school personnel, the distance in terms of travel, and the time required to carry out thorough investigations.

In compliance with the George Mason University Human Subjects Review Board and the condition of confidentiality with the educational institutions, the three schools will be referred to throughout this project as 'Central,' 'East,' and 'West.' Central is a small, rural K to 12 school located in the Midwest. East and West are relatively large suburban high schools in the same school district located on the East Coast. Demographics will be provided in later sections. These schools were chosen based on the recommendations of conflict resolution practitioners with firsthand knowledge of the programs but more importantly the researcher was able to establish a rapport with the program coordinators and was able to gain access to their time and information through mutual understanding and respect for the field of conflict resolution. They also demonstrated an exceptional degree of flexibility and were very supportive of the mission of the project.

C. Data Collection Methods

Prior to data collection, the researcher contacted each school district for permission to secure the names of those involved in the design, development, and implementation of the respective programs. Program coordinators were contacted via phone and email to discuss the parameters of the study and ascertain whether or not they would be amenable to participate. School principals and administrators were also contacted for approval to use the program and to allow access to any faculty, staff, or outside consultants associated with the program. [See Appendix 2 for Informed Consent Form] Once the necessary steps were taken to identify sites and secure approval, the data collection process was established.

It should be noted that even though students are regarded as key stakeholders, as mentioned in subsequent sections, the author decided not to include them in the data collection process for a number of reasons. First of all, the process for securing Human Subjects Review Board approval, as well as individual school approval at the district level, becomes much more challenging once students are part of the protocol. The time it would have taken to secure this approval did not fit the timeline for this research project. In addition, the goal of the data collection was geared more towards programmatic development in terms of program origin, objectives, model, implementation, evaluation and sustainability. Although student perspective would have been valuable in terms of measuring program impact on overall school climate and overall success, the time to secure approval and the limited information they would have been able to provide in

terms of program development persuaded the author not to include them in the data collection process.

The primary means of data collection was done through in-person semi-structured interviews, as well as a small number of phone interviews and email exchanges. Using the work of Tricia Jones and Dan Kmitta for the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management as a guide, a series of twelve open-ended questions was developed into a questionnaire and used as the basis for the interviews (Jones and Kmitta 2002). [See Appendix 1 for Interview Questionnaire] In addition, information on program development, curriculum design, and evaluative information was collected through:

- Documents – Administrative documents, Letters, Memoranda, Agendas,
- Archival records – Organizational Records, Survey Data, Lists of Names
- Interviews – Open-ended, Semi-Structured Questionnaire
- Direct observation – Field visit, Casual Data Collection Activities
- Physical artifacts – Tools, Instruments, Physical Evidence Collected during Field Visit, Curriculum Guides

Each of the program coordinators was willing to share information about how their respective programs were run and the materials they used to do so. With respect to the actual breakdown of interviews for each school, the researcher interviewed twelve teachers, three guidance counselors, and four members of the administration, including the principal and the superintendent of the school district, for Central. Those interviewed for East included the program coordinator, who is a special education teacher, a tenth grade assistant principal, and the chair of the English as a Second Language [ESOL]

department. Those interviewed for West included the program coordinator, who is a guidance counselor, the guidance counselor who initiated the program and now functions as an outside consultant, and the ninth grade assistant principal.

Participation in this study was determined primarily by the availability of time since every interview conducted required the author take personal leave from his full-time employment. The higher number of interviews conducted for Central reflects the three uninterrupted days the author was able to spend on a scheduled site visit. With respect to East and West, scheduling had to be done on an individual basis, therefore, interviews were conducted with faculty and staff most closely associated with the program.

D. Data Analysis Strategies

The goal was to gain a holistic understanding of conflict resolution education programs. Using Druckman's concept of "focused comparisons," the use of a multiple-case research design allowed the researcher to draw generalizations by comparing the case studies. Best practices emerged as the researcher had the opportunity to study the programs in context using documentation, direct observation, and participant information. This type of inductive approach began with open-ended research questions followed by an analysis of the data to look for themes and develop broad generalizations. The use of this descriptive approach as the general analytic strategy will be discussed next.

According to Yin (2003), one general analytic strategy is to develop a framework for organizing the case study. This is used when "the original purpose of the case study may have been a descriptive one" or when "a descriptive approach may help to identify the appropriate causal links to be analyzed" (Yin 2003, 114). In this case, causal links could only be established by comparing and contrasting the findings from each of the case studies. With respect to the individual case studies, one of the questions sought to establish correlations between the program and dependent variables such as academic achievement, communication skills, discipline referrals, suspension rates, school violence, and attendance/dropout rates but the majority of questions were designed to describe the how the program operates as a whole and to gain a sense of how effective it has been from the perspective of the interviewees. Generalizations about the effectiveness of conflict resolution education programs as a whole could best be drawn by using a descriptive approach that would allow patterns and themes to emerge, ultimately leading to a set of best practices.

IV.   CASE STUDY DATA/RESULTS

The goal of this case study analysis was to develop a holistic understanding of how each individual program was conceived, designed, implemented, and sustained in order to provide insight into how such programs can be adapted to meet the needs of other educational institutions. The purpose of this section will be to report the results obtained from the data collection process. The following eleven themes were covered in

the data collection process and will be address in the following section: conceptualization, program goals and objectives, program model, program development, implementation and curriculum design, evaluation, impact on school climate, correlations between dependent variables such as academic achievement, suspension rates, incidents of school violence, etc., sustainability, measure of success, and recommendations for best practices.

A. Central High School

i. Demographics

Central High School is a public school serving grades K to 12 located in the Midwest. Demographics include 60 kids per grade (total ~800), 89% Caucasian, 10% Latino, 1% African American. 30-35% are on free and reduced lunch and the county it draws its students from has the highest unemployment rate in the state.

ii. Conceptualization

The idea and justification for Central's conflict resolution education program came from multiple sources beginning with staff observations of poor student behavior, incidents of bullying, and other conflict-related issues, especially at the middle school level. The staff decided to become proactive and address the root cause of these issues.

Two of the guidance counselors attended a conference on using a 'Peer Helpers' model in which students performed mock mediations. In addition, they attended a conference, along with a group of Central students, hosted by the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management on how to create comprehensive school-based conflict resolution management programs based on the WAVE model.

This model uses students, under the supervision of adult trainers, to train other students to become peer mediators, speak at conferences, and facilitate trainings. Using a 'student as trainer model,' this program trains students and adults to become mediators and conflict managers. A formal mediation process used for grades 6 to 12 and a shorter, less formal conflict management program used for grades K to 5 in the cafeteria, playground, and classroom. Once the students become trained, they teach the training lessons and lead the training activities. In addition to reducing conflict and providing mediation services like similar school-based peer mediation programs, WAVE students attend and present at national conferences, become student trainers, provide professional development for staff, parents, and community, become facilitators for other schools, and collaborate with community organizations. Along with the two guidance counselors, a group of students attended the conference as well. They, along with the counselors, were so impressed with the program model; they decided to bring the ideas back to the school. This original core of students began advocating for the program through faculty presentations and facilitations to their fellow students during certain class periods. Concomitantly, during the time when the WAVE program was being established, the faculty saw the need to have more 'value education' in order to create a better school

atmosphere, as well as a better society. It was during the 2000 to 2001 school year when these three forces came together to create what is now the S.O.A.R for Peace program [Students Offering Acceptance and Respect].

iii. **Program Goals & Objectives**

The overall goal to the program was to improve the atmosphere of the school environment by reducing the number of interpersonal conflicts, especially bullying, and teaching students how to work their conflicts out constructively. Given the large number of conflicts prior to the program, another goal was to prevent conflicts from getting worse and teaching students they have better options than fighting. Since the core of the WAVE program involves training students to become peer mediators and helping students learn how to work out their conflicts in a constructive manner, a secondary goal was to have students internalize the mediation process. The theory was that if students are exposed to peer mediation and conflict resolution principles at an early age, by the time they reach high school they would be able to use the process on their own without the help of mediators. One of the teachers remarked that many of the students at Central are able to "just go into a room and talk" on their own to solve their interpersonal issues.

iv. **Program Model**

The program model at Central consists of a comprehensive program that includes peer mediation and integration of conflict resolution lessons into the curriculum. New members are recruited into the program in the fourth grade through facilitations led by older S.O.A.R members during their English classes. The older S.O.A.R members lead classroom discussions on topics such as perception, prejudice, stereotypes, tolerance, empathy, etc., as well as the benefits of peer mediation. Interested fourth grade students must fill out an application that requires teacher recommendations and parental consent. Between five and ten fifth graders are selected for the SOAR program each year. Overall, S.O.A.R has approximately one hundred members school-wide.

All S.O.A.R members must attend a mandatory three-day summer training academy. The purpose of the training academy is to teach the mediation process to the new students, as well as to students from other schools. The training is run entirely by the older S.O.A.R members. All participants are eligible for a Visions of Peace conference in the fall that attracts students from over thirty schools from grades 6-12 from across the region, which allows them to meet other students interested in peer mediation and conflict resolution from across the state and showcase their knowledge.

Central uses peer mediations to handle conflicts between students, as well as conflicts between students and staff. Mediations are conducted by two trained peer mediators. If a conflict occurs, a referral is generated either by the administration or faculty or by the students themselves. The disputants, as well as the two mediators, are

pulled out of class time and the mediation is held in a conference room adjacent to the guidance office.

v. **Program Development**

Program development will encompass how the idea gained traction with the administration and faculty, who the key stakeholders were and how they were identified, the extent to which the administration has been supportive, the type of funding the program receives, and the extent to which students have bought into the program. In order to gain traction with the administration and faculty, the guidance counselors put on a presentation and had the group of students who attended the WAVE conference perform a mock mediation. In addition, teachers and administrators were given coursework as part of an in-service project that dealt with conflict resolution. All three of these tactics resulted in the necessary staff buy-in to institute the program.

The key stakeholders included the superintendent, administrators, faculty and staff, and the students themselves. There was a buy-in from the top beginning with the superintendent and the administrators. Evidence of this comes from the large number of referrals [Central averages approximately thirty mediations per school year since 2004 to 2005] and the fact that all of the administrators support the program and encourage the staff to utilize the referral process. One principal, in particular, spoke at length about the value of this program's ability to teach lifelong skills that last beyond the classroom and advocated for conflict resolution training to be a required course in teacher training.

Most of the faculty, especially teachers with a penchant for social justice, supports the program. In fact, some of the teachers have utilized the mediation process themselves in order to solve a conflict with a student. Parents and community members have bought into the program as well. Lastly, the students themselves bought into the program, beginning with the group of students who attended the WAVE conference. These students 'sold' the program to the student body by advocating for the benefits of the mediation process during English class facilitations.

In terms of funding, the program began with a grant from the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management in the amount of $3000.00USD for the 2000-2001 school year. The school also received a three-day training on conflict management for four staff members and ten hours of consultant hours from WAVE. The cost of running the program for a school year is estimated at less than five thousand USD. Costs include conference fees and training costs such as supplies, etc. In order to cover these costs, the local school board pays a stipend to the two guidance counselors to run the program and S.O.A.R members hold various fundraisers throughout the school year to raise money, such as T-shirt and food sales. Money is also raised by charging outside schools who participate in the three-day summer training academy.

vi. **Implementation & Curriculum Design**

The curriculum comes from a variety of sources. Most of the curriculum comes from the resource guides put together by the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution

and Conflict Management. The other resources for conflict management lessons were organized and assembled by the guidance counselors through various conferences and workshops they have attended, as well as literature pulled from libraries and internet resources. The major themes include perception, stereotypes, prejudice, feelings, conflict escalators and de-escalators, bullying, accepting others, communication, handling anger, and friendship.

In terms of implementation, the students themselves are almost entirely responsible for implementing the curriculum. The guidance counselors pull the curriculum together and design the lessons but it is the older S.O.A.R members who are responsible for teaching the lessons to the younger students and training the new members with respect to the mediation process. The role of the guidance counselors is to oversee the direction and administration of the program but it is the S.O.A.R members who advocate for the program, facilitate school-wide conflict resolution activities, and run the summer training academy.

vii. **Program Evaluation**

The S.O.A.R program has not undergone a formal evaluation, as defined by the 'Recommended Standards for Evaluation' put forth by the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR). Feedback has been collected regarding the summer training but the overall program has not been evaluated from an outside agency or school district personnel. Informal evaluation has taken place in the form of faculty and staff

discussions during faculty meetings and administrative feedback, as well as informal surveys conducted by the guidance counselors. Data collected from other parts of the interviews will be used to evaluate the program from the perspective of the ACR. It should be noted, the utility of conducting an internal evaluation to measure effectiveness for both the conflict resolution lessons and the peer mediation component was discussed with the program coordinators during the interview process.

viii. **Impact on School Climate**

Staff reported the program as having a positive impact on the school environment. Peer mediations have contributed by empowering the students to solve their own problems. Staff reported students as being better able to resolve conflicts since the conception of the program, especially the junior high students. They have seen the number of conflicts during lunch duty 'diminish tremendously' over the past ten years. Staff members also reported the student body is much closer in terms of being tolerant and accepting of others and that this program has made the school more tight-knit. Many of the teachers interviewed said it has made the students better-rounded and has helped turn the student body on to community service. According to them, it has helped students think about what other people in the world might need and how they can make a difference.

Staff reported this program to be a very powerful tool for classroom teachers. The classroom lessons presented by the S.O.A.R members have engaged the students to

think about how to deal with conflict situations and have given them options to use other than physical force when faced with conflict. In terms of mediations, some of the teachers have utilized the process by entering into peer mediations as a disputant with another student and have agreed to have their conflict mediated by students. The outside community is aware of this program's impact on school climate and has been very supportive.

From an administrative standpoint, the program has helped administrators deal with conflicts in school. The mediation process has reduced the amount of secondary conflicts by dealing with the root cause of the issues and has been used as an administrative tool to offset lost class time due to suspensions. Students are given the option of reducing their disciplinary sentences by participating in a mediation process. With respect to bullying, students have become aware of what it is, how they can recognize it when it takes place, and how to report it. Administrators contend students and community members realize Central is serious about bullying and will not tolerate it.

ix. **Correlations between Dependent Variables**

Correlations between the S.O.A.R program and dependent variables such as academic achievement, communication skills, discipline referrals, suspension rates, and incidents of school violence were assessed. With respect to academic achievement, a correlation can be found with between the program and the grades of its members as evidenced by the improvement of grades upon entering the program. Staff reported an

increase in communication skills as a result of the classroom lessons facilitated by S.O.A.R members. For instance, several teachers remarked how the program has enabled students to sit down with each other to solve problems on their own. They are more likely to try S.O.A.R ideas, with respect to solving problems, before turning the issue over to the Administration. The S.O.A.R program coordinators reported an increase in communication skills by their members as well.

According to the staff, bullying was a major concern prior to the implementation of the S.O.A.R program. With the institution of the peer mediation program and a bullying program, there has been a marked decrease in the number of such incidents. One of the principals remarked, "I think everyone felt that school was a safe place and bullying would not be tolerated." Suspension rates have decreased every year since the program commenced which in turn has decreased the time students lose outside of class for disciplinary actions. According to the staff, there has been a significant decrease in school violence as well since the program began, with the 2009 to 2010 school year having the lowest number of incidents. In fact, administrators described only one 'major' fight as taking place in the school during the 2009 to 2010 school year. One guidance counselor went as far as saying, "discipline is not an issue."

x. **Sustainability**

The S.O.A.R program does not have a 3 to 5 year plan but its program coordinators have taken steps to ensure continuity. Like many school-based programs, it

is driven by a few individuals who have a passion for the subject and have gone above and beyond to make it a success. The two guidance counselors at Central are the driving forces behind this program. Both of them expressed concern the program will cease to exist once they retire even though they said they will make sure the incoming counselors are supportive of the program during the interview phase. One of the teachers, however, believes the program is sustainable since enough students and parents believe it is valuable enough to demand its continuance. In order for the program to survive once the counselors retire, a critical mass of students, teachers, parents, and administration will have to advocate for it.

xi. **Measure of Success**

Participants were asked to measure the success of the program in terms of its ability to transform attitudes toward conflict or any specific personal examples they might have had. The following vignettes illustrate the success of the S.O.A.R program. One of the teachers interviewed was a member of the original group of students that attended the WAVE conference and was responsible for bringing the idea for the program back to Central. She characterized herself back then as being a shy student with low confidence in her academic and public speaking abilities. She was the typical student who would 'fly under the radar.' Through her advocacy and participation in S.O.A.R, she was able to discover new talents she did not realize she had such as her leadership ability and the confidence to speak in public. As a result of this experience,

she went on to become a professional educator at the elementary level and is pursuing the opportunity to teach education courses at the university level.

Another teacher emphasized how the program has had a positive impact on teacher attitudes. This was one of the teachers who used the peer mediation process to help solve a conflict between her and one of her students. Although teachers naturally enjoy a position of authority over students, the very nature of the mediation process neutralizes this power imbalance, which leaves most teachers reluctant to try it. This teacher, however, agreed to the terms of the mediation and allowed the peer mediators to resolve the issue between her and her student according to the terms set forth by the student mediators. Afterwards, she described the session as being 'very successful' and said the experience had changed her relationship with the student in a positive direction.

The Drama teacher at Central not only uses the core principles of the S.O.A.R program as the basis for her high school musicals, but shared a personal story in which the S.O.A.R program was able to transform the life of one of her students who she characterized as a "leader in a negative direction." This student demonstrated awful behavior in elementary and junior high and had been written off by many faculty and staff but when he entered the S.O.A.R program in high school, it forced him to make a change. She said he was able to transform himself in a positive direction by adhering to the principles and commitment of the S.O.A.R program and became one of the most unlikely success stories she has ever witnessed.

In terms of the peer mediation process, every staff member interviewed described it as being successful. Success was measured by the ability of the mediators to use the

process to deal with the core issues of a problem and resolve them before reaching the point of violence or aggression. The process allows all parties to explain their point of view and values what each disputant has to say, which neutralizes power imbalances and gives a voice to each of the participants. The fact that the peer mediators came from diverse backgrounds and were representative of the population as a whole contributed to the success as well.

Administrators at Central reported how the S.O.A.R program has helped them with discipline. They are able to recommend the peer mediation process as an alternative to strict disciplinary action. Not only does it provide a way of dealing with the core issues in a way suspension or classroom removal cannot, it cuts down on the time spent on discipline, especially administrative paperwork, which the principal called an "emotional drain." If students choose to go through the peer mediation process, their disciplinary sentences are reduced, which means less valuable classroom time is lost. One administrator went even further by mentioning the most valuable tool he could leave behind as a legacy would be for students to have the opportunity to gain the lifelong skill of being able to resolve conflict in one's own life.

B. **East High School**

i. **Demographics**

East High School is a public school serving grades 9 to 12 located in the Northeast. The student body is approximately 1300 students with 23% Asian or Pacific Islander, 8% African American, 38% Hispanic, 28% Caucasian, and 4% Other. 46% of the student body is on free and reduced lunch. These figures are based on the 2008 to 2009 school year.

ii. **Conceptualization**

The program began in 2005 with a passionate guidance counselor who adopted the peer mediation model. The program has been under new leadership from the chair of the Special Education department for the last three years. The peer mediation program is on the School Improvement Plan, which is a school document that addresses the programs and strategies if will employ to create an atmosphere conducive to learning and improve student learning. In addition, conflict resolution is designated as one of the student rights and responsibilities in the District handbook. Not only has peer mediation been emphasized in this school but it is also recognized by the school district.

iii. **Program Goals & Objectives**

The goal of this program is to effectively train a cadre of peer mediators to serve as role models and student leaders for the student body. The objective is to provide the school with an effective mediation component to resolve issues and conflicts between

students, as well as between students and teachers. A long-term goal of the program is to have a 'school-wide conversation' on conflict resolution and peer mediation so that it becomes more than just a program but a school-wide way of dealing with problems. The program coordinator would like to see this program play a much larger role in shaping the overall school climate.

iv. **Program Model**

East offers a year-long elective course in Peer Mediation, taught by the program coordinator, which meets for ninety minutes every other day. There are forty-five trained peer mediators, with most of them coming from having taken the elective course. Students complete their training certification by November in order to attend a regional peer mediation conference for high school students. They are then eligible to facilitate workshops for the elementary/middle school conference in March.

v. **Program Development**

The idea for peer mediation gained traction with the administration and faculty as a useful alternative to strict disciplinary consequences for student misconduct. Administrators liked the fact that mediators dealt with the root cause of the issue in a way simply removing students from class cannot. They also liked the success rate of the mediations as they found very few repeat offenders once the issue had been resolved in

mediation. In addition, it was used as a way to shorten suspensions and save valuable class time.

The key stakeholders involved the administration, faculty, and the school board. Overall, the program was characterized by staff as not receiving much support. The peer mediation class is not a top priority with decision makers and schedule makers. According to one staff member, the program has to "fight" with assistant principals to get students referred to mediation. Only certain assistant principals, including the one interviewed for this project, actively support the program and refer students.

There is evidence of student buy-in. Those who have taken the class or used the mediation services have become involved with the program. According to the program coordinator, all it took was one mediation to "hook" the students. She explained how the mediators, as well as the disputants, were impressed with the way the mediations led to a resolution and felt good about the process. Student buy-in can be measured by the number of students who have used the process repeatedly to solve other issues.

vi. **Implementation & Curriculum Design**

In terms of the curriculum, the school district has conflict resolution specialists within the Central Office responsible for designing the curriculum. A number of individuals were responsible for putting together a mediation handbook that serves as the main tool for classroom instruction, as well as the peer mediation conference and workshops. The training component was run by the program coordinator. She holds an

initial training session in the summer followed by a series of after school sessions in the fall to make sure her peer mediators are certified by November.

vii. **Program Evaluation**

Students have provided informal evaluations but a formal evaluation of the program has not taken place.

viii. **Impact on School Climate**

According to the program coordinator, the program has not made much of an impact on the overall school climate but there have been "pockets of success." For instance, one of the administrators responsible for underclassmen reported using the mediation program quite frequently as an alternative to strict suspensions (~ 40 referrals). Another teacher reported how the overall tone in her class became much better after she sent the two disruptive students to mediation. Furthermore, the chair of the English as Second Language [ESOL] department explained how the mediations were especially helpful in combating inappropriate behavior, particularly with respect to cultural differences between males and females. She credits the diversity of the mediators as the key to being able to sit down and relate to the younger boys of similar ethnic backgrounds. Although the impact of the program has not reached the entire school,

these "pockets of success" certainly contribute in no small way to the overall functioning and well-being of the school.

ix. **Correlations between Dependent Variables**

With respect to dependent variables, one administrator drew a clear link between the mediation program and academic achievement in terms of saving lost class time. He mentioned how his office was able to utilize mediations as a consequence of misconduct to save, in his words, "hundreds" of days worth of class time. The program itself cannot be directly linked to raising grades but it can serve to limit the amount of valuable time lost to discipline. In addition, this administrator believes the program has played a role in making the school less violent.

The other variable with which this program has made an impact is communication skills. As the core skill of conflict resolution education, not only have the communication skills of the mediators improved but so have the skills of those associated with the program whether it be the students in the elective class or disputants. Each staff member interviewed for this project agreed with this assessment.

x. **Sustainability**

The sustainability of this program is in jeopardy. The program coordinator was given a new role in the school, which will take away the free planning period she had

used to coordinate mediations. There is currently no 3 to 5 year plan and the school will have to find a qualified replacement for the next school year. This will have to be done quickly to provide continuity. In the past, however, the school has used an intense advertising campaign in the fall to attract and recruit peer mediators.

xi. **Measure of Program Success**

Success, according to the interviewees, can be measured by the extent to which the mediation techniques were transferred outside of the mediations to social settings. For instance, the program coordinator witnessed a number of students, including special education students, using the mediation techniques with their friends. Although the actual number of mediations has steadily declined from forty-five in 2005 to 2006 to fifteen in 2009 to 2010, the full year elective peer mediation class has enabled a number of students to become exposed to the principles of mediation, as well as become trained.

According to one administrator, the program has not only saved a significant amount of time from out-of-school suspensions but has been very successful in being able to avert collateral violence from arguments and fights. One of the major problems from fights, he explained, is the amount of collateral damage done from secondary fights, i.e. friends of the disputants. Since peer mediations are based on confidentiality and do not involve the friends of disputants, the process has been very successful in keeping the secondary fights to a minimum. This administrator also noted the percentage of disputants who fight after going through mediation is negligible.

C. **West High School**

    i. **Demographics**

West High School is a public school serving grades 9 to 12 located in the Northeast. The student body is approximately 2100 students with 25% Asian or Pacific Islander, 9% African American, 15% Hispanic, 46% Caucasian, and 5% Other. 21% of the student body is on free and reduced lunch. These figures are based on the 2008 to 2009 school year.

    ii. **Conceptualization**

The program at West began as a peer counseling initiative, inspired by the Girl Scout's peer helping model that taught girls how to listen and help others. It started out as an after school class and then morphed into a full-blown peer mediation program as the school district, which is the same as East's, became focused on conflict resolution and peer mediation. The concept began with a passionate guidance counselor, who has since retired but still helps the current program coordinator, a guidance counselor as well.

iii. **Program Goals & Objectives**

The goal of the program is to strengthen the overall school climate of the school. Peer mediators are trained not only to facilitate mediations but also conduct school-wide activities on conflict resolution-related themes, as well as function as role models and school leaders. They were described by the staff as "mini-counselors." The ultimate goal is to teach students how to be tolerant and give them the tools to problem-solve. The program coordinator described the program as a forum for students to air their differences so they could return to the educational setting and be able to maximize learning without having to focus on distracting issues.

iv. **Program Model**

West does not have a stand-alone peer mediation or conflict resolution course. It is an after school activity that meets bi-weekly after school on Wednesdays. Training begins in the summer and is completed during the fall. Students are certified by November in order to attend a regional peer mediation conference for high school students. They are then eligible to facilitate workshops for the elementary and middle school conference in the spring. In addition, they perform skits for the entire school via closed-circuit TV on topics such as bullying, harassment, violence prevention, etc.

v. **Program Development**

Gaining traction with the administration and faculty was characterized as a "slow process." The counselors at West have had to fight to use their free time for the program. Trainings have been conducted during teacher workdays since it is difficult to keep attendance up during after school sessions. According to one administrator, all of the assistant principals use the peer mediation process but the ninth and tenth grade assistant principals utilize it more based on the maturation level of students. The faculty knows about the program and is supportive. The counselors had the students perform a mock mediation at a faculty meeting to generate support. Most of the faculty uses the process indirectly in that the referrals they generate are filtered through the assistant principals, where it is determined whether or not it will go to mediation. The administration at West does use mediation as an alternative to offset suspension sentences.

The key stakeholders are the administration, the faculty, and the school board. The administration has been characterized as being generally supportive. The level of support varies by the grade level of assistant principals and the amount of referrals they send.

According to the staff, the students at West are aware of the peer mediation program. According to one administrator, student buy-in can be measured by the number of disputants who ask for repeat sessions. Most students who have gone through the mediation process have liked it and recognized how it can help, thus, are prone to ask for

repeat sessions. Student buy-in is also a result of the informal nature of the program.
Most kids seek out mediators, since they are leaders, for informal mediations.

vi. **Implementation & Curriculum Design**

In terms of the curriculum, the school district has conflict resolution specialists
within the Central Office responsible for designing the curriculum. A number of
individuals were responsible for putting together a mediation handbook that serves as the
main tool for classroom instruction, as well as the peer mediation conference and
workshops. Each fall the counselors train between eight to twelve students to become
mediators. There are currently twenty-five trained peer mediators at West.

vii. **Evaluation**

Students have provided informal evaluations but a formal evaluation of the
program has not taken place.

viii. **Impact on School Climate**

The impact on the overall school climate has been "effective" according to the
guidance counselors. They point to the fact that the peer mediators put on a number of
conflict resolution-related activities throughout the school year that reach the entire

student body. They both said the program has raised awareness for topics such as bullying, dating violence, and sexual harassment. One administrator described the impact on the school climate as being "huge." Her assessment can be traced to the effectiveness of the mediations with respect to resolving student issues. She said there are rarely any repercussions after students have gone through the mediation process. She also thinks the program has a direct effect on the reduction in school violence, as the number of fights in the school this year was very low compared to other school years. The strength of the program, in her opinion, is the fact that it gets "kids talking to kids." She believes dispute resolution and life lessons are most effective for students when they come from peers, which is the core aspect of peer mediation.

ix. **Correlations between Dependent Variables**

One administrator believes the program has had a positive effect on academic achievement since it is has saved valuable class time as an alternative to disciplinary sentences and helps students resolve disputes that would otherwise cause them to lose focus in class. Communication skills of the peer mediators definitely improved and an argument can be made that the mediation process has helped the communication skills of those who have gone through it. As mentioned previously, discipline referrals are generated independently of the program but since the number of repeat offenders is negligible it can be argued the mediation process has cut down on the number of secondary referrals. Data could not be obtained to draw a correlation between the

program and suspension rates but the program did help administrators cut down on the out-of-class time lost to suspensions. Last but not least, a direct correlation between this program and school violence was drawn by those interviewed. The number of fights in the school has been on the decline every year since the inception of the program and the number of bullying incidents has decreased, theoretically due to the awareness raised by this program.

x. **Sustainability**

The program at West has been in existence for ten years. Although there is no formal 3 to 5 year plan, the program coordinator not only has the energy and the flexibility to run the program effectively but she has the consultation and support of the guidance counselor who founded the program. Like any school-based program continuity will depend on the support of the faculty and staff and the ability of the program coordinator to sustain the interest of the students.

xi. **Measure of Program Success**

The longevity of the program speaks for itself [10 years]. It should be noted this is due in part to a commitment from the middle schools that feed into West to provide training and raise interest at an early age. The mediations themselves have been the measure of success for this program. One administrator estimated the success rate, as

measured by whether or not the disputants had to repeat the process for the same issue, at 95 to 98%. She remarked how "there is something in the process" that helps students resolve their issues and adhere to the rule of confidentiality. The program has also been successful in raising awareness for a number of important topics and has made a positive impact school climate and contributed to reducing school violence.

V.   ANALYSIS

Using Druckman's concept of "focused comparisons," the following section will analyze the results for all of the variables mentioned above, except for measures of program success, in order to draw generalizations about the theory, development, sustainability, and impact of conflict resolution education programs as a whole. Following this section will be a discussion of best practices and recommendations that emerged through the data collection and analysis process.

i. **Conceptualization**

This section will use the evidence gathered from the three case studies to better understand how and why these programs came into existence. The origin of these programs came from both internal and external sources. With respect to the former, internal motivation based on observation of student behavior from faculty and staff helped them recognize the need to support programs that address student behavior by

providing life skills. For instance, faculty recognized the need to provide programs dealing with anti-violence, bullying, and self-esteem in order to create self-awareness and address critical school needs such as better attendance, a school climate more conducive to learning, and increased student achievement. Moreover, they recognized that in order for schools to help students become more productive citizens and create better societies, schools must provide more 'value education' and provide opportunities to learn how to deal with conflict more effectively. Furthermore, one of the school districts made conflict resolution a priority by establishing the right of students to resolve conflicts with others in a nonthreatening manner and holding students accountable to use whatever means necessary, including peer mediation, to resolve conflicts in an appropriate manner.

The case studies also revealed the use of external models to help create and establish their particular programs. One of the programs began as a peer counseling initiative based on the Girl Scout's 'peer helping' model. Another program used an external model, the WAVE program, to address bullying concerns and other conflict-related issues by training students to become peer mediators and agents of change within their own school. In addition, the Association for Conflict Resolution, an organization dedicated to enhancing the practice of conflict resolution, has developed a set of recommended standards for school-based peer mediation programs that serve to enhance and justify the significance of such external models.

Whether the conception came from an internal or external model, a central theme that ran through all three of the programs was the origin and development being centered around one or more passionate guidance counselors. Although teachers were found to

have contributed in some form or fashion, it was the guidance counselors at each of the schools that functioned as the driving force behind each program. Whether it is inherent in their job description or can be traced to their individual nature with respect to providing counsel and guidance for students, the guidance counselors provided the passion and desire to bring these programs to fruition. With the exception of the program at East which is currently being run by the chair of the Special Education department, the guidance counselors provided the backbone of these programs. It should be noted a guidance counselor was responsible for originally getting the program started at East.

In order to understand why this might be the case, it is important to look at the responsibilities of coordinating such a program and analyze how the job requirements of guidance counselors might be a better fit than those of teachers. In order to run an effective program, the coordinator must be able to find the time to train the mediators, have the flexibility to schedule mediations, locate physical locations for the mediations to take place, and monitor the mediation which includes filling out the necessary paperwork and conducting a debriefing session with the mediators. The coordinator should also possess some form of mediation training and/or certification in the field of conflict resolution, as well as being familiar and comfortable with the mediation process. The latter criteria can be obtained by guidance counselor or teacher alike but the requirements in terms of having the flexibility to monitor and schedule mediations is much more conducive to the schedule of a guidance counselor. The ultimate criteria, however, would be to have a background in conflict resolution and mediation and have the ability to train

students in mediation and the passion to advocate for the benefits of such a program in the role of program coordinator.

ii. **Program Goals & Objectives**

Four major themes emerged with respect to program goals and objectives. The first major theme to evolve was that schools have the responsibility to teach students how to deal with their problems in more constructive ways. Students should be given a skill set in order to help them resolve their personal conflicts in an effective and appropriate manner. Likewise, students should be given the opportunity to develop a set of advocacy skills so as to raise their social and emotional awareness and increase their confidence by giving them a voice. Programs aimed at strengthening self-esteem and self-confidence will likely result in a decrease in school violence and bullying incidents.

Another theme that emerged was having students internalize the mediation process and use it to prevent conflicts from becoming worse. For instance, the goal of one of the schools was to give the students the tools to recognize conflict and be able to solve it on their own by talking it out. It was the goal of another school to create a forum for students to air their differences in order to be able to return to the educational setting. Taking these goals one step further, all three programs were designed to prevent conflicts from getting worse and to teach students they have more effective means of resolving differences than physical force. In all three settings, the peer mediators themselves, as well as most of the disputants, were able to internalize the mediation process and use it

effectively on their own terms, however, the goal was to produce a 'school-wide conversation' on conflict resolution and peer mediation in order for all students to be exposed to the mediation process and be able to use it as well to deal with their problems and issues.

This theme provides an appropriate segue into the third theme of improving and strengthening the overall school climate. All three schools listed this as being one of their top priorities. All three would like to see the peer mediation component become a larger part of the school climate, especially as it pertains to disciplinary action as an alternative to punitive measures. Program coordinators for each program said they would like to see both faculty and administration utilize the peer mediation component to a greater extent by sending more referrals and using it as an alternative to strict suspension sentences. The coordinators also shared how they believe these programs might serve to strengthen school climate by reducing inappropriate student conduct and bullying and helping students become more accepting and tolerant of cultural differences. One way of doing so is by developing a group of role models and school leaders who are able to train others and conduct mediations, as well as facilitate conflict resolution activities school-wide.

The fourth theme deals with the ability of the program to offer professional development opportunities such as trainings, workshops, and conferences for students to turn theory into practice and engage the larger community. The purpose is to engage the staff, parents, and community by bringing awareness of violence prevention programs to both the school and the community. These programs serve to develop a group of role

models and school leaders who are able to train others and conduct mediations. In order to strengthen their skills, opportunities should be made available to attend trainings, conferences, and workshops.

iii. **Program Models**

Each case study provided a different program model. One school has a comprehensive program whereby students are recruited in the fourth grade to become peer mediators and then go on to facilitate conflict resolution lessons to the elementary students once they reach the junior high level. Another school offers a year-long stand-alone peer mediation elective class and a group of mediators trained using extracurricular means. The third school offers a peer mediation program as an after school activity that uses bi-monthly after school meetings in the fall to train its mediators. In order to analyze these models with the goal of developing an 'ideal' program model, the logical starting point might be to compare how each model relates to the school's program goals. Each program model will be measured against its ability to meet the goals of teaching students how to resolve conflicts in an effective manner, its ability to strengthen the overall school climate, and the opportunities for professional development it provides for students.

Central's program model consists of a combination of peer mediations conducted during class time under the coordination of guidance counselors and conflict resolution lessons facilitated by older S.O.A.R program members to the elementary students.

Membership in the S.O.A.R program is approximately one hundred members. With a student population of approximately eight hundred students from grades K to 12, the ratio of those with conflict resolution and peer mediation training (S.O.A.R members) to the student body is nearly 1:8. Since class time is reserved for the older S.O.A.R members to teach conflict resolution lessons to the elementary students during their fourth grade English classes, every student in Central is, at the very least, exposed to the principles of conflict resolution and peer mediation, which not only meets the needs of the first goal but satisfies the goal of strengthening the overall school climate. In addition, opportunities in the form of a state-wide 'Visions to Peace' conference and a summer training academy contribute to professional development opportunities for students to showcase their knowledge and engage with the broader community.

East's program model consists of a year-long peer mediation elective class and peer mediations conducted during class time under the supervision of the Special Education department chair. There are forty-five trained peer mediators in a school with a population that ranges between 1000 to 1500 students from grades 9 to 12. With respect to the first goal, East does a great job of teaching a select number of students, those enrolled in the elective class, the fundamentals of conflict resolution but the rest of the student body does not receive this training. With forty-five peer mediators, most of which have come from having taken the elective class, the ratio of those with conflict resolution and peer mediation training to the student body ranges between 1:22 and 1:33, depending on the total size of enrollment. Although some students do receive valuable training, the relative effect on the overall climate of the school, based on the ratios, is

much lower than that of Central's. East does have professional development opportunities for students in the form of regional conferences for high school students and a combined elementary and middle school conference.

The program model at West takes the form of an after school activity that begins with a summer training session but meets bi-monthly in the fall in order to train peer mediators. Mediations are conducted during class time by twenty-five trained peer mediators under the coordination of a guidance counselor. The population of the school ranges between 2000 to 2500 students from grades 9 to 12, which would make the ratio of those with conflict resolution and peer mediation training to the student body between 1:80 or 1:100. Although the ratios are considerably higher than those of Central and East, the peer mediators do have an impact on the overall school climate by performing skits on conflict resolution-related topics for the entire student body in a similar fashion to the way Central's S.O.A.R members impact the student body by facilitating conflict resolution lessons to the younger students. However, the number of students who receive hands-on, in-depth training is relatively minimal compared to East and very minimal compared to Central. West also has professional development opportunities for students in the form of regional conferences for high school students and a combined elementary and middle school conference.

The question then becomes what an ideal program model should look like. In order to satisfy the main goal of teaching students how to resolve conflict effectively, there needs to be a mechanism that has the potential to reach all students. An ideal scenario would be for a school to offer mandatory stand-alone conflict resolution and

peer mediation classes as part of the core curriculum. It is the position of this paper that conflict resolution and peer mediation courses be given the same weight as core courses such as math, science, social studies, and English. If, however, these courses are relegated to elective status, the goal would be to make sure every student has the opportunity to enroll and benefit from what it has to offer.

Given budget constraints, the rigidity of class scheduling, and the added variable of finding qualified and certified instructors in this subject, the next ideal scenario would be for schools to make sure every student is at the very least exposed to the principles of conflict resolution and peer mediation. This can be done through a variety of ways. One is to train a significant core of students that function as the role models and 'peace makers' of the school. To maximize effectiveness, schools should aim to create the lowest possible ratios between trainers and student body, as evidenced by the 1:8 ratio at Central High School. The goal would be to create a critical mass of peer mediators that would function as the leaders of the school to promote peace and conflict resolution by example.

If stand-alone classes are not able to be offered and the critical mass remains low, the third scenario would be to develop a mechanism to raise awareness throughout the school by providing sufficient opportunities for the entire student body to be exposed to the principles of conflict resolution and peer mediation. In the case of Central, it was able to train enough S.O.A.R members to facilitate lessons to all fourth grade classes, ensuring every child in the building receives exposure. Although to a lesser extent, the case of West was still significant in that its trained peer mediators were able to perform

skits on conflict resolution-related themes that were broadcast to the entire student body via closed-circuit TV. They also facilitated a number of class lessons on bullying in much the same way Central performed its classroom lessons. In addition, schools should provide professional development opportunities, in terms of workshops, trainings, or conferences, for students who are interested to enhance their conflict resolution and mediation skill sets and train other students. All three schools in this case were able to meet this criterion. If the underlying goal is to create awareness, an ideal program model would be one that finds a mechanism to ensure every student in the building has access to and is exposed to the principles of conflict resolution and peer mediation.

iv. **Development**

a. **How the Idea Gained Traction**

In terms of the program development process, each school was asked how the idea for the program gained traction with the administration and faculty. In the case of Central, the guidance counselors, along with a group of students, attended a conference and brought the idea back to the administration and faculty. They introduced the concept during teacher in-service days and had students perform mock mediations in front of the faculty, which created the necessary staff buy-in. With respect to East, a passionate guidance counselor and a school board mandate for conflict resolution paved the way. West's program began as a "peer helper" model and grew into a peer mediation program

under the leadership of the guidance department, aided as well by the school board mandate for conflict resolution.

One aspect that was clear from these cases studies was that it takes a passionate person or persons to bring the idea to the administration and faculty. In all three cases, it was the guidance counselors who were responsible for recognizing the importance of peer mediation and bringing the idea to the faculty. They understood the power of teaching students how to resolve conflict in constructive ways and used their time and advocacy skills to convince their respective administrations of its importance, as well as create staff buy-in. Programs of this nature begin with the dedicated professionals who understand the importance of such programs and are willing to bring the ideas back to the schools or school districts.

Once the idea has been presented, the next step is to gain the support and approval of the administration and faculty. One of the proven ways of doing so is by presenting firsthand knowledge of how the program operates through the use of mock mediations performed by student mediators themselves. A presentation to the faculty made a strong argument in two of the case studies and won staff buy-in. Another method might be to engage the faculty through conflict resolution coursework, as Central's guidance counselors did. The entire faculty was given conflict resolution training during an in-service day as part of their professional development. Teachers were able to connect how the principles of conflict resolution might help them in the classroom and administrators were shown how peer mediation might be a useful tool as an alternative to discipline action. Both methods helped create the necessary staff buy-in.

b. Key Stakeholders

The key stakeholders for any program of this nature would be the school leaders and decision makers beginning with the Superintendent and continuing on to the Administration, as well as the School Board. The next tier would be the faculty and staff, especially the teachers and guidance counselors. Any school personnel connected to the discipline process might be important since they might impact the number or direction of referrals being sent to mediation. It might also be important to involve parents and the community at-large since both can serve as a means of external support, especially when it comes to funding. Outside organizations such as local mediation services and nonprofit organizations committed to violence prevention and social justice might be important to establish a connection with in terms of professional development opportunities for students and as consultants for curriculum development. Last but not least, the most important stakeholders are the students themselves. Without the buy-in of students, the program will not take hold, as will be discussed in an upcoming section.

c. Measure of Administrative Support

It might be prudent to draw a correlation between administrative support and the strength of the program by comparing and contrasting the relative support each of the three programs receives. Central had the direct support of its superintendent and Administration, as well as the school board, which finances the guidance counselor's

stipends for running the program. Faculty and staff are encouraged from the top to accept and utilize the program. Evidence of its utilization can be found in the large number of S.O.A.R members, the opportunities is provides for its members, the low S.O.A.R to student body ratio, the number of referrals for mediations, and the extent to which the entire student body is exposed to conflict resolution principles. Although West enjoys a generally supportive Administration, the importance placed on its program is not nearly as strong as that of Central's, which is reflected in its after school status and large mediator to student body ratio. East's support is even less, which might explain its seeming inability to reach the overall school culture despite a number of trained mediators and a full-year elective class offering.

d. Measure of Student Buy-In

As mentioned previously, in order for a program to be successful, the ultimate stakeholders have to be the students themselves. Therefore it is useful to examine the different degrees of student buy-in and understand how that came about so as to contribute to the overall success of the program. Each one of the case studies reported significant levels of student buy-in. In the case of Central, it was the students themselves that introduced and sold the program to both the faculty and students. After attending a WAVE conference, a courageous and dedicated group of students performed mock mediations for the faculty and traveled to English classes throughout the school advocating on its behalf to their fellow students. As a result, the program is in its tenth

year and has over one hundred members. The S.O.A.R club enjoys a prestigious status as one of the "cool" school clubs to be a part of.

In much the same way, the students of East embraced the peer mediation program as a result of witnessing mock mediations. One teacher said, "All it took was one mediation to 'hook' the students." Once the students, both mediators and disputants, felt the power of being able to resolve conflicts and the satisfaction of finding resolutions that were able to last, the students bought into the program. Staff at West described the students as being "aware" of the program. The buy-in came from the dynamic nature and leadership abilities of the mediators themselves. Evidence of buy-in can be found in the number of repeat sessions requested by students who liked the process, found it useful, and were willing to utilize it again. The evidence from all three case studies suggests students will buy into conflict resolution education and peer mediation programs, particularly if the peers that run the program exert dynamic leadership and are representative of the student population. Buy-in will also occur if membership affords special prestige among peers.

v. **Implementation & Curriculum Design**

The purpose of this section will be to compare the different forms of implementation and highlight the main themes of the curriculum design. In terms of implementation, there are two methods for training peer mediators. In one case, students themselves are responsible for training new mediators. The other method involves the

program coordinators running the trainings. Mediation training is based on the following core components: introductions and explanations, storytelling, issues and needs, problem solving, and resolutions. The first step involves introductions by both parties and the mediator, as well as an explanation of the process by the mediator. He or she explains the role of the mediator, the stages of the process, the ground rules, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the mediation. The next step involves each party sharing his or her side of the story. Once both sides have had the opportunity to present their side, mediators help the parties identify and clarify the larger issues and each person's underlying needs. The next step is the problem solving step whereby mediators help the parties brainstorm possible solutions and select the solutions they think will best resolve the conflict. The final step involves working out the final details so the resolution is agreeable to both parties and will be followed. (Fairfax County Public Schools 2007, 11)

With respect to curriculum design, the program coordinators at Central were responsible for pulling resources together for classroom lessons. In the case of East and West, the school district's Central Office has conflict resolution specialists who design the curriculum, as well as the mediation handbook used for conferences. Since all three programs used similar curricula, the rest of this section will be devoted to highlighting the main themes that emerged. Each program began with a definition of conflict and discussed ways of dealing with conflict situations such as escalating and deescalating factors, particularly "I" messages. The core skills included communication and active listening skills, and recognizing different styles of handling conflict. Peer mediation training included negotiation/mediation skills, decision-making, and seeking win-win

solutions. Other themes included appreciating diversity, understanding different cultures, developing empathy and dealing with stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination.

vi. **Program Evaluation**

The goal of this project was to understand how these programs came into existence, how they were developed, and how they have been sustained. Understanding how they have been evaluated was also a key component, as most school-based programs have an evaluation component designed to give feedback as to how the program is operating and how it can be improved. Unfortunately, none of the case studies in this project reported having any formal measures of evaluation. In some cases, student feedback was collected informally regarding the summer trainings but no quantifiable data existed with respect to overall program operation and development. With that being the case, the goal of this section will be to discuss how conflict resolution education programs should be evaluated based on current literature. In addition, there will be a discussion as to why formal evaluations are not in place in these three cases and suggest what could be done to install and improve the evaluative systems for future programs based on these shortcomings.

According to the 'Recommended Standards for School-Based Peer Mediation Programs' put forth by the Association for Conflict Resolution, (ACR, 2007) evaluating program effectiveness for any peer mediation program is an essential component. Evaluation serves to improve the operation and service of the program, enhances

sustainability, and can be used to promote the program to the school, community, and key stakeholders, as well as funders. Programs should be evaluated either by an internal self-assessment or by outside evaluators such as school district personnel. The evaluation should start with the program goals and then measure the implementation process and outcomes, followed by evaluation of the training process and the competency of the mediators. With respect to the implementation process, ACR recommends the evaluation should focus on the number of cases referred, the origin of the referrals (self-referral or administrative), the number of cases mediated, and the nature of mediations. In terms of the latter, the evaluation should focus on the agreements, or resolutions, the trends with respect to the topics mediated, the demographics of both mediators and disputants, and the percentages of students who have used the program, as well as the percentage of staff that have made referrals. Further measures of implementation might include the cost of operating expenses, the staff hours required to operate the program, and the extent to which parents and the community were involved.

With respect to outcomes of mediations, ACR recommends evaluating the satisfaction level of disputants, the percentage of agreements honored, and the satisfaction of the school community with the program. Furthermore, evaluations should focus on how the program has contributed to social justice issues and the satisfaction of specific groups in terms of gender, race, class, age, sex, ethnicity, religion, etc. Feedback should be sought on the training component of the program and the effectiveness of the instructors. Last but not least, ACR recommends evaluating the competency of the mediators themselves. This can be done through self-assessments and debriefings with

the program coordinator following mediations, observation of mediations by the coordinator, and feedback from the disputants as to the level of satisfaction with the process and quality of mediators.

Even though the ACR standards stress the importance of evaluating a program, having the time, money, and resources to conduct such evaluations can pose an obstacle, as was the case for the three schools in this project. First of all, it takes time to carry out a successful, in-depth evaluation. The program coordinators would have to spend a significant amount of time designing and administering surveys and conducting interviews with mediators, disputants, and other associated school personnel. On top of the issue of time, which is extremely critical in any school environment, there is a question of resources. Not only does it take time to prepare and conduct evaluations, it also takes money to pay for the extra resources or the extra time required to work above and beyond contract hours. The hidden factor is the fact that most of these programs, with the exception of Central whose program coordinators receive a $1500 stipend from the local school board to run the entire program, do not get paid additional salary to run these programs.

It must be noted, the demands of teaching a full schedule or maintaining a guidance counselor's workload are extremely demanding on one's time and energy. Although volunteering can be a noble cause, it is human nature to want to be rewarded for the fruits of one's labor. Without adequate compensation, it becomes very difficult to expect a program coordinator, who is already working overtime to train the mediators and schedule the mediations, to have the time, let alone the motivation, to conduct any type of

formal evaluation. It is the position of this paper that until proper emphasis, meaning proper compensation, occurs, conflict resolution education and peer mediation programs of this nature will not receive proper evaluation, thus, will be in danger of stagnation and becoming less effective and sustainable.

In order to improve the evaluation system, schools and school districts should recognize the importance of these programs and allocate appropriate funds to recruit more staff participation, increase the number of mediators, and by extension the number of mediations, and invest in the time and resources needed to conduct evaluations commensurate with the ACR standards. It should be noted, however, these standards were designed specifically for peer mediation programs. Although peer mediation constitutes the core of each of the programs at Central, East, and West, attention must also be given to the evaluation of non-peer mediation components such as school climate and other conflict-related issues. The next section analyzes the impact of the three programs on school climate.

vii. **Impact on School Climate**

With respect to overall school climate, the goal was to figure out how the responses of the three case studies could be used to gauge the potential impact of future programs of this nature. In terms of Central, the consistent response was that its S.O.A.R program had a 'positive impact' on the overall school climate. The staff described how the number of conflicts in the school had decreased, especially during the lunch period,

and the ability for students to solve their own problems was evident in the classrooms and hallways. As further testimonial, some of the faculty that were interviewed for this project had been on staff prior to the inception of the S.O.A.R program in the 2000-2001 school year. Each of them attested to the fact that school violence and fights had steadily decreased since the program was instituted and that they experienced a more 'tight-knit' and accepting/tolerant student body as a result.

Although staff at East reported 'minimal' impact on overall school climate, there were reported "pockets of success." For instance, one staff member spoke about how a conflict between two students in the same class was severely impacting the overall class atmosphere in a negative fashion. After the two students went through the peer mediation process, not only was their conflict resolved but order was restored to that individual class. Staff and administrators at East shared individual "pockets of success" stories like this one that, although small, contributed to the overall school climate of the school.

Furthermore, the peer mediation program at East had a tremendous impact on the English as a Second Language (ESOL) population, according to the chair of the department, who also happened to run the character education activities at East. In her capacity as a classroom instructor, she witnessed a number of issues based on cultural differences, especially the treatment of females by male students, which she characterized as "bordering on sexual harassment." She was able to have her students utilize the peer mediation program and found not only were the issues resolved but many of the females were able to gain a 'voice' and were able to use the process as a means of empowerment.

It should be noted the key to the success of these mediations, according to this instructor, was having a diverse staff of peer mediators, especially older students from similar cultures who could relate to the younger students and speak from a position of authority.

Both faculty and administrators regarded West's peer mediation program as "effective" not only because the mediations were successful but because they were able to reach the entire student body. One administrator claimed the program had a "huge" impact on the school climate because the number of fights and incidents of school violence had been the lowest in the eight years since she had been at West. In fact, she claimed the number of significant conflicts had decreased ever since the inception of the program in 2005. This was due in large part to the successful nature of the mediations, as evidenced by the fact that there were very few repeat issues after the mediations. Although some of the same students did repeat the process, they did so with a fresh issue. Out of the forty-five mediations, this administrator only had two freshman female students who did not honor the resolutions and required further disciplinary action.

Based on the testimony of these three case studies, the positive effect these programs might have on overall school climate is clearly evident. Despite the differences in student population (range 700 to 2500) and program model, each one of these programs was able to make an impact on the overall school climate. Whether it was through the mediations themselves, school-wide activities around conflict-related themes, or reaching particular segments of the student population, both faculty and administration believed these programs were "effective" and had a positive impact on the overall school climate.

Correlations between Dependent Variables

One of the research questions sought to determine whether a correlation could be drawn between these programs and the following set of five dependent variables: academic achievement, communication skills, discipline referrals, suspension rates, and school violence. Through the course of the data collection process, a sixth dependent variable, attendance/dropout rates, was incorporated. Although no quantifiable data was given to support a correlation from a statistical sense, relationships between the programs and these variables can be drawn using qualitative measures.

All three case studies reported a link between academic achievement and their program. First of all, the grades of the S.O.A.R students reportedly increased after joining the program, or at the very least these students maintained higher grades than the average student at Central. Secondly, since students who agree to undergo peer mediation most likely receive shorter disciplinary actions, a correlation can be drawn between academic achievement and less time being lost out of class. For example, an administrator at East said the mediation process had saved "hundreds" of days worth of out-of-class suspensions. Moreover, conflicts between students interfere with the ability to focus during class, especially if the students share the same class. A program that can help resolve conflicts will allow students to re-focus and maximize classroom learning time. In both cases, conflict resolution education and peer mediation programs have the potential to increase academic achievement by reducing the amount of lost class time.

It is very difficult to measure if these programs had an impact on student attitudes toward school. Central reported a noticeable change among its student body. East and West were not able to confirm the idea that their program had a significant effect on the entire student body but they did say it had a positive effect on its mediators. From a theoretical perspective, students need to know they are being valued. Arguably it is the responsibility of the schools to help students resolve conflict by making conflict resolution or peer mediation skills available (Fairfax County Public Schools, 2009, p. 8). That being the case, programs such as these can and should be in a position to transform the attitudes of students toward school if they are able to help them find value and resolve conflict.

All three case studies reported a correlation between their programs and communication skills, especially the communication skills of the mediators. One of the hallmarks of conflict resolution education curriculum is teaching students how to communicate better. The nature of the mediation process itself requires advanced communication skills. Mediators must be comfortable communicating the ground rules and procedures, as well as being able to guide the disputants through the process and facilitate resolutions. In addition, peer mediators, in most cases, are required to publicly advocate for their trade by speaking to peers, faculty, and other audiences at conferences. One of the most compelling testimonials came from a second year teacher at Central who was one of the original group of students to bring the S.O.A.R program to her school. She characterized herself as an average student who was shy and not entirely confident in herself much less her ability to speak in front of others. As a participant at the first

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WAVE conference, she and her classmates decided the comprehensive conflict resolution education/peer mediation program was something their school could benefit from and brought the concepts back to Central where they advocated for them in front of faculty and peers. As she reflected on that experience, she said it was then that she grew more confident in herself, became more comfortable speaking in front of others, and sewed the seeds of her interest in becoming a professional educator, with plans to teach at the university level in the near future. This type of experience is indicative of the impact these programs have on communication skills.

There is no correlation between the programs and the numbers of discipline referrals that come in. Referrals are generated independently of these programs but the possible correlation might be the decrease in repeat offenders. Each one of these case studies reported a very low, even negligible, rate of students receiving a discipline referral for an infraction that was dealt with through mediation. This is not to say the same students did not return to mediation but if they did it would have been for a new issue. Given the success of the mediations as being measured by the ability of disputants to honor the resolutions, an argument can be made that these programs might decrease the number of discipline referrals by reducing the number of secondary referrals for the same issue.

Along the same lines as discipline referrals, there is no quantifiable data to statistically prove suspension rates have decreased as a result of these programs; however, administrators at each of these schools have stated unequivocally that suspension sentences have been reduced as a result. All three schools use peer

mediations as an alternative option to strict suspension. In most cases administrators give the offender(s) the option of going to mediation as a condition for shortening the disciplinary sentence. As previously mentioned, such practice has saved hundreds of hours in potential lost class time. More importantly it provides students the opportunity to deal with the source or root cause of the conflict. Several staff questioned the value of suspensions in the first place since they merely remove the student from the source of the conflict for a temporary amount of time without addressing the root cause of the issue. A similar argument to discipline referrals can be made in that these programs might decrease the number of suspensions by reducing the number of secondary suspensions for the same offence. At the very least, they help students deal with the infraction in a way suspensions and class removal cannot.

All three schools reported a steady decline in school violence since the inception of each program. In fact, one administrator at Central said the current 2009 to 2010 school year had the lowest number of incidents as far as she could remember and went as far as saying "discipline is not an issue." West reported a decline in school violence and staff at East believed the program had made the school less violent as well. One of the reasons for these trends might be the introduction of anti-bullying programs and conflict resolution-related activities. Students that are bullied do not feel comfortable or valued at school and do not feel as though they have a 'voice.' Programs that address these issues and create empowerment serve to keep students in school and might contribute to an increase in attendance figures and limit dropout rates.

ix. **Sustainability**

One of the key goals was to understand the extent to which each school has taken steps to ensure continuity or sustainability. Each participant was asked if the program at his or her school had developed a 3 to 5 year plan. None of the schools in this project had reportedly done so, however, sustainability can be measured in a multitude of ways, according to the Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR). The purpose of this section will be to discuss the criteria that can potentially be used to ensure sustainability followed by an analysis of the extent to which each of these programs have done so. Lastly, implications for improved sustainability will be presented.

According to the ACR, in order to maintain high quality programs and ensure sustainability, the most important criteria is to retain dynamic, qualified staff to run the program. All three of the programs in this project more than satisfy this criterion. Central is run by two guidance counselors who instituted the program ten years ago. They design the curriculum, train the mediators, attend workshops and conferences to bring the latest research back to the program, and go way above and beyond the financial stipends they receive to coordinate the program. The program coordinator at East has been running the program by herself for the past five years. Not only does she train the mediators during the summer and fall on her own time but she uses her extra planning period given to her as the Special Education department chair to schedule mediations and oversee the program. She does all of this without receiving any extra salary. The same is true of the program coordinator at West. She took over the program this year and does all

of the training, mediation scheduling, and coordination of school-wide activities on conflict resolution-related topics for her mediators to present to the entire school. All of this is done without extra salary. The commitment, enthusiasm, and passion each of these program coordinators displays is undeniable.

According to the ACR, the following eight criteria can be used as a measure of sustainability: meeting the needs of diverse groups, providing advanced training for coordinators and mediators, performing community outreach and fundraising, providing in-service presentations to new staff, integrating conflict resolution concepts into school curricula, networking with programs at other schools, performing presentations, workshops, and training at conferences and other schools, and conducting teacher-student mediations.

The ACR suggests such programs should meet the needs of diverse groups. Every one of these programs is staffed by mediators that mirror the student body population. Each one of the coordinators made a point to share the fact that mediator slots are open to all students and that students are recruited so that the program is representative of the student body. In fact, it was mentioned previously how the program at East was able to meet the needs of the ESOL population by having peer mediators from particular ethnic backgrounds.

The second criterion of providing advanced training for coordinators and mediators has been met by all three schools. Each one of them provides training for new mediators. In terms of advanced training, all three schools provide opportunities for its coordinators and students to attend workshops and conferences dealing with mediation.

In addition, the school district East and West belong to has partnered with a local nonprofit community mediation service to help train and further enhance the mediation skills of its student mediators. All three schools have access to outside mediation services to enhance the skills of their mediators.

Each of the three schools has performed community outreach and fundraising. Central performs numerous outreach activities to raise community awareness and was even given space at a local church to host its summer training, in which schools from all over the region send students to attend. East and West both use fundraising events to raise money. The programs share strong support from their respective PTSAs (Parent-Teacher Associations) and the community is aware of the work they are doing.

All three schools provide inservice presentations to new staff. In order to gain faculty and administrative buy-in, each one of these programs performs mock mediations followed by a presentation to the staff at faculty meetings. One of the questions asked of the interviewees was whether or not the faculty and staff were aware of their programs. Each one of them answered in the affirmative. As to the extent to which conflict resolution concepts had been integrated into the school curricula, this question was not addressed directly, however, Central incorporates conflict resolution facilitations into its curriculum by having its mediators give lessons during fourth grade English classes. It also incorporates conflict resolution topics into its Drama program, which exposes the whole school. East offers a year-long elective Peer Mediation class and West performs school-wide skits on conflict resolution-related topics. To this extent, all three schools do

incorporate conflict resolution into the school curriculum but the extent of integration in other subjects was not addressed.

Last but not least, each of these schools networks with programs from other schools. Central hosts a summer training that is attended by schools from across the region. In addition, its mediators put on presentations at a regional Visions of Peace conference attended by hundreds of students. Both East and West attend a regional conference in the fall for the region's high school mediators attended by hundreds of students as well. In the spring, they perform skits and mock mediations, as well as facilitate breakout workshops, at the same regional conference for elementary and middle school mediators. Lastly, two of the schools were able to conduct mediations between teacher and student. Although none of the schools reported having a 3 to 5 year plan, all three more than satisfy the ACR requirements for sustainability.

The question becomes whether or not the ACR standards serve as an adequate measure of sustainability. Although each of the programs is staffed by dynamic individuals, meets the needs of diverse populations, provides training and inservice for students, faculty, and staff, and networks with other schools and the community at-large, these criteria do not address the extent to which each of these schools could maintain its program if one or more of its program coordinators were to leave for some reason. In the case of Central, both coordinators expressed their doubts however they did say they would make continuing the S.O.A.R. program part of the interview process for their replacements. In addition, one of the teachers believed there was enough institutional

knowledge as well as a critical mass of teachers, students, and parents that would push to maintain it.

East and West, on the other hand, are run by only one program coordinator. In the case of East, the coordinator will be leaving her current position as chair of the Special Education Department. During our interview, she expressed doubts as to whether or not she could continue given her new schedule and did not think the program would continue. West is equally susceptible to the winds of change. Although it has a consultant in the form of the former coordinator, it is run by one guidance counselor who runs the entire program and receives no extra compensation. With that being said, these programs seem sustainable based on the ACR standards but a lack of institutional knowledge and over-reliance on a very small number of individuals leaves their sustainability in question.

VI.   BEST PRACTICES/RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to developing a better understanding as to how conflict resolution education/peer mediation programs are run and their impact on school culture, the overall goal of this project was to develop a set of 'best practices' or recommendations for future educators or staff personnel interested in developing new programs based on the testimony of those interviewed for this project. The following eight themes emerged and will be covered in the following section: the mediation component of the program, ideas for creating energy and stimulating student interest, sustainability, program development

and implementation, evaluation, the role of administration, the skills it builds for students, and options for the classroom.

A. **Mediation Component of the Program**

Participants were asked "what works best" for their respective conflict resolution education program. The unanimous answer was the mediation process since it serves as the core of each one of the programs. The "official" nature of the process in terms of confidentiality, the formal steps, and the way the process forces students to listen, ask questions, and problem solve, as well as its adherence to binding resolutions, provides the greatest opportunity for transformative change. Participants described how the process creates a power balance between disputants, something especially important in mediations between teacher and student and cases where one party does not have a 'voice.'

B. **Ideas for Creating Energy and Stimulating Student Interest**

In terms of creating energy and stimulating student interest, advertisement campaigns involving flyers, posters, and program demonstrations should be done throughout the school year to increase recruitment and boost enrollment. Reminders could be incorporated in the daily school announcements and program coordinators should be visible and advocate on a daily basis. They should provide opportunities for

student mediators to perform mock mediations for staff and administration to generate buy-in, as well as for students to stimulate interest.

Schools should provide opportunities for conferences and workshops because this is where students are able to show off their skills and share their knowledge. This is where energy is created for the subject and a celebration of skills. Another idea might be to have a thematic-based week such as 'Peace Week' to gain visibility for the program and celebrate peace-related activities. In keeping with this themes, several of the teachers suggested it would helpful for students to see themselves as peacemakers "promoting peace."

C. **Program Development and Implementation**

Mediators should be diverse, have dynamic personalities, and 'mirror' the student population. There needs to be whole-school buy-in from the top down: Administration to entire staff. Finding adequate time and space for mediators is crucial. Teachers and staff should support the program by allowing mediators to miss class to conduct mediations, by sending more referrals, and by helping to promote the program. It is important to have constant monthly meetings among mediators in order to become more comfortable talking and sharing with each other and being able to build trust with the staff and training needs to be provided on an ongoing basis.

D. **Sustainability**

In order for programs to become more sustainable, a critical mass of support needs to develop. Key stakeholders need to be identified and targeted for support. Schools need partners, volunteers, and an "army of supporters" that understand the benefits of the program and are willing to advocate on behalf of the program. These programs should tap the power of parents, community, and outside organizations, particularly with respect to sources of funding.

Developing a critical mass of outside support is crucial but support inside the school is even more critical. Students should promote the program by performing mock mediations for staff and students. Another key would be to expose students to mediation training at an early age, for instance at the elementary and middle school levels. Sustaining a program at the secondary level would benefit from a strong middle school pipeline since attrition rates for high school students will increase due to busy schedules according to a number of participants.

Another key component would be to expand the scope of institutional knowledge throughout the staff. In most cases, these programs are staffed by one or two staff, which leaves a program in jeopardy if one is to leave or be transferred. It would be advantageous to have at least two staff members, possibly more, with the institutional knowledge capable of carrying on in the absence of a colleague.

E. **Evaluation**

Data should be collected and analyzed to justify effectiveness and secure funding. An informal feedback system should be developed that might include surveys from students, staff, administration, and parents/community, as well as formal outside evaluations from school district personnel or outside organizations. Measures should be put in place to monitor quality control of mediations. For instance, program coordinators should make sure they are being conducted properly through debriefings and observation. The goal is to make sure the peer mediators are effective and competent. Evaluations should conform to the standards put forth by the Association for Conflict Resolution, as well as many of the variables presented in this report.

F. **Role of Administration**

Administrators should show support by giving conflict resolution education programs the recognition and credit they deserve. This can be done by elevating the status of peer mediation and conflict resolution classes from elective status to core status alongside math, science, English, and social studies. Classes should be offered in Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution and they should look for ways to incorporate conflict resolution lessons into the school schedule. They should also recruit highly qualified conflict resolution practitioners to run programs, teach Peer Mediation/Conflict

Resolution courses, and run school wide activities that will impact the overall school climate and foster a more positive learning environment.

Administrators should take an interest in the program, attend workshops, and speak up in support at community meetings. They should recognize how peer mediation can help them professionally by cutting down the amount of lost class time and paperwork due to suspensions. They should also recognize how the mediation process addresses the root causes of conflict, thereby, resolving issues and preventing secondary referrals, as well as secondary fights between the friends of the disputants. Moreover, they should appreciate the power of having peers solve problems, since many of the participants believe students are more apt to listen to each other rather than adults. In addition, administrators should utilize these programs by sending more referrals to mediations. The utility of the program comes from being able to deal with core issues through mediations, build conflict management skills of the student body, and address attendance/drop out problems.

G. **Skill Development**

Students learn how to manage conflicts and problem solve issues more effectively. There is an empowering aspect with regards to training other students, especially those from other schools. Communication skills of mediators improve. It can

be argued the communication skills of participants who have undergone the mediation process improve due to exposure to the formal steps of the process: introduction and explanation, storytelling, issues and needs, problem solving, and crafting resolutions. The mediation process teaches students how to listen, ask questions, and problem solve, as well as learn how to advocate for oneself. Other skills include developing empathy, becoming more tolerant, appreciating diversity, increasing cultural awareness, dealing with anger, and learning how to use integrative approaches to conflict situations based on cooperation and seeking mutual gain.

H. **Classroom Options**

One administrator made the following comment, "friends can step in and help if they are aware." If this theory is correct, then the goal should be to expand opportunities for raising awareness throughout the whole school. Both Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution courses should be offered and incorporated into the curriculum. Conflict resolution principles should be integrated into the curriculum through school wide activities, core subjects, and elective courses. For example, the Drama class at Central integrates conflict resolution themes into its plays. Schools should also find time in schedule to integrate conflict resolution lessons such as during homeroom, special periods, etc. An example would be the Eagles concept at Central that uses small group discussions once a month for forty-five minutes during a modified schedule. These groups are composed of less than a dozen students from all grades. It is an open forum

for discussion on issues dealing with home life, feelings, emotional awareness, etc. The lessons are designed by the guidance counselors and feedback is generated for the Administration. Many of the teachers and staff interviewed for this project were very supportive and enthusiastic about the way this program builds camaraderie, breaks down barriers, and allows students to become comfortable speaking with one another, especially freshman talking to upper classmen. This can be used as another conflict resolution tool in the toolkit.

VII. CONCLUSION

Conflict, whether it originates in school or is brought in from the outside, disrupts the learning environment and hinders students' ability to focus, thus, will have a negative impact on academic achievement. The root of the problem comes from the reality that many students come to school ill-equipped to deal with conflict in a constructive manner. The primary goal of education, according to the U.S. Department of Education, is demonstrated proficiency on standardized tests; a goal very much dependent on the ability of administrators and teachers to maximize class time. A program that will help minimize disruption and reduce lost class time due to disciplinary action, as well as teach students how to deal with conflict in a more constructive manner, will not only contribute to meeting the goals of education set forth by the federal government but will increase the overall well-being of society by decreasing the frequency and intensity of violence. Such

programs exist and should be implemented in every school across the country and across the world for that matter.

Research-based peer mediation programs began in the 1960s from social interdependence theory, which sought to teach students the nature of conflict and how to use integrative negotiation procedures to mediate conflicts. Researchers in the field of conflict resolution, along with members of the legal profession, nonviolence advocates, and activists, began developing programs to teach students how to deal with conflict in a more constructive manner. Estimates range between 5,000 and 8,000 conflict resolution programs existed in 1994 but given the considerable impact they might have on school environment in terms of achievement, discipline, and empowerment, as demonstrated through this study, this number should most definitely be higher.

The purpose of this research study was to better understand how such programs came into existence, how they were developed and implemented, and how they were evaluated and sustained. The goal was to provide insight into how the practice of conflict resolution education can be adapted to fit the needs of other educational institutions by analyzing the operation of three existing conflict resolution education programs and by developing a set of best practices for future programs. The ultimate goal was to justify the expansion of such programs by demonstrating how they might contribute to meeting the needs of federal mandates such as the current version of No Child Left Behind with respect to student proficiency. The research on conflict resolution education, along with the data collected and presented in this analysis, does just that. Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs have the potential to increase academic achievement by

reducing time lost for disciplinary action, as well as helping students focus in class by giving them the tools to handle conflict constructively. In addition, these programs build valuable lifelong skills, help students create positive, healthy relationships with peers and adults, and have the potential to improve overall school climate by making it more conducive to learning. They build communication and speaking skills, empower students to have a 'voice' and learn how to advocate for themselves, and build self-esteem and self-confidence. Whether through an elective course, an after school offering, or a comprehensive program such as Central's, programs of this nature should become a federal mandate and a priority of every school district across this country.

This study utilized a qualitative multiple-case design to develop a holistic understanding of how three conflict resolution education programs originated, were designed and implemented, and how they have been sustained. Data collection was done primarily through in-person semi-structured interviews with staff members associated with the program but was also obtained from program documents, archival records, direct observation, and physical artifacts. Participants were asked a series of open-ended questions regarding the conception of the program, goals and objectives, program model, program development, implementation and curriculum design, evaluation, impact on school climate, correlation between a number of dependent variables, and sustainability. Analysis was based on grounded theory whereby patterns and theories would emerge through participant information. The results were analyzed in order to draw generalizations about the theory, development, sustainability, and impact of conflict resolution education programs as a whole.

In terms of impact, each program was reported to have a positive effect on school climate. The trends that emerged were a decrease in conflicts and incidents of school violence since the inception of each program, successful mediations that resulted in a decrease in secondary referrals, and a significant impact on school climate as measured by a more accepting and tolerant student body, mediations that dealt with sensitive cultural issues and empowered female students, and school wide activities around conflict resolution-related themes that were able to reach particular segments of the student population.

All three schools reported a link between their programs and academic achievement whether it was an increase in achievement with the mediators themselves or a correlation between achievement and less time being lost out of class due to peer mediation being used as an alternative to disciplinary action. Theoretically, programs such as this can help transform student attitudes toward school if they are able to help students find value and resolve conflict. All three reported an increase in communication skills, especially mediators. An argument can be made that these programs might decrease the number of discipline referrals by reducing the number of secondary referrals for the same issue. Administrators at all three schools reported a decrease in suspension sentences when peer mediation was used as an alternative option, which has saved hundreds of hours in lost class time and has provided students with opportunities to deal with the root cause of conflict. All three schools reported a steady decline in school violence since the inception of each program. Programs that address bullying and

conflict resolution-related themes might contribute to an increase in attendance and limit dropout rates.

Having considerable experience in the classroom as an educator at the middle school and secondary levels, it is the opinion of this author that the American public school system, with the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, has been moving in a slippery slope away from an institution that takes into account holistic development as well as social and emotional learning towards one that reduces students to qualified test-takers. With the recent emphasis on standardized test scores as qualifiers for federal aid, as well as measures of success, administrators are under considerable pressure to make sure their schools' perform well on these tests. This pressure then gets placed upon the teachers with some school districts even going so far as linking teacher pay with student performance.

This author does not disagree with the idea of having standards for learning and that a goal of every school should be to make sure its students know how to read, write, and perform mathematical operations. However, the emphasis being placed upon these standardized tests results in what has become a household phrase in education these days: "teaching to the test." As opposed to utilizing creativity and freedom to design fresh and innovative lesson plans, teachers are sometimes faced with scripted lessons that reflect the material on standardized tests. The problem is that our schools are becoming so focused on the core courses, they are limiting or excluding many of the elements that make up a well-rounded educational experience such as the arts, music, and other non-core electives, even physical education. This poses a serious problem for courses like

conflict resolution or peer mediation. They find little room in today's public school curriculum although teaching students how to deal with conflict might be one of the most important lessons they could receive.

This study has clearly demonstrated the benefits of conflict resolution education. Students are not learning the tools to deal with conflict effectively in the home nor are they learning them in the neighborhoods. It is becoming the responsibility of the schools to provide such training. If we want to reduce violence and keep our schools safe, conflict resolution education should be a top priority. Likewise, if the goal of education is to pass standardized tests, these programs will help contribute to that by reducing classroom disruption and lost class time, helping students re-focus by helping them deal with conflict, and helping keep them in school by building self-confidence and self-esteem. We owe it to our students to take their social and emotional learning into account. As we as a society strive to make the world a safer place and seek perpetual change, it would serve our students and our educational institutions well to incorporate conflict resolution and peer mediation into our schools.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview Questionnaire

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY | Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution
Truland Building, 3401 Fairfax Drive, MS 4D3, Arlington, Virginia 22201
Phone: 703-993-1300; Fax: 703-993-1302; Web: icar.gmu.edu

**Conflict Resolution Education: A Case Study Analysis** – **Interview Questionnaire**

1. Can you tell me the story of the conceptualization of your school's conflict resolution education program?

    a. How was it justified?

2. What are the program goals and objectives?

3. Please describe your program. For example, what is the program model or structure in terms of classes offered, peer mediations, etc.?

4. With respect to the development process of your program:

    a. How has the idea gained traction with the administration and faculty?

    b. Who were the key stakeholders and how were they identified?

    c. How supportive has the Administration been of this program? Can you be specific in terms of "evidence" of support?

    d. What sort of funding does this program receive, if any?

    e. Did the students buy into the program? If so, can you be specific in terms of "evidence" of their buy-in?

5. In terms of implementation, how was a curriculum identified and designed?

    a. Who was responsible for putting the curriculum together?

    b. What did the curriculum consist of? For example, was there a training component, such as outside trainers or conflict resolution education experts brought in to train the staff and/or students? Anything else?

6. How has the program been evaluated? If so, how does that happen? If not, is there any plan to have it evaluated?

7. From your observations, what effects, if any, has this program had on the overall school climate? Please be as specific as possible.

8. Can you draw any relationships (preferably correlations) between this program and the following? Please be as specific as possible.

    a. Academic achievement
    b. Attitudes toward school
    c. Communication skills
    d. Discipline referrals
    e. Suspension rates
    f. Violence

9. In your opinion, is the program successful?
    a. In what ways?
    b. Has it been successful in terms of transforming attitudes towards conflict? Are there any specific examples you can point to?

10. With respect to sustainability, what steps has your school taken to ensure continuity?

    a. Does this program have a 3-5 year plan?

11. As a master's candidate with the goal of designing and implementing my own CRE program, what recommendations can you give me in terms of best practices?

    a. What has worked best?

    b. What would work even better?

12. Where do you see this program headed in the future?

Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Tim Kennedy
Master's Candidate
George Mason University
Institute for Conflict Analysis & Resolution

Analysis of Conflict Resolution Education Programs: A Case Study

Lead Investigator: Mr. Timothy G. Kennedy, Master's Candidate

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Mara Schoeny

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES
This research is being conducted to analyze how specific conflict resolution education programs came into existence, how they were designed and implemented, and how they have been sustained and evaluated. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide detailed explanations with respect to your relation to the program, how it was conceived, and how it currently operates. Participants will be asked to provide an overview of the program and how it has been evaluated, assessed, and sustained.

RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS
There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in the field of conflict resolution education.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The data in this study will be confidential. No data gathered for this study will be shared with other participants. All names and references will be kept confidential unless specifically given the right to identify the participant by name in the final paper. Information will be gathered either through phone conversations, written surveys, email correspondence, or site visits. Any written material will be collected by the researcher and remain in a locked file.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.

CONTACT
This research is being conducted by Timothy G. Kennedy, Master's Candidate within George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis & Resolution. He may be reached at 571-275-1096 for questions or to report a research-related problem. The faculty advisor for this study is Mara Schoeny. She can be reached at 703-993-9191. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Subject Protections at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT
I have read this form and agree to participate in this study.

_____
Name

_____
Date of Signature

REFERENCE LIST

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Timothy G. Kennedy graduated from Brandywine High School, Wilmington, Delaware in 1993. He received a B.A. in Sociology from Franklin and Marshall College in 1998 and an M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Delaware in 2000. He began his teaching career in Cairo, Egypt as a science teacher at Thebes American College in Cairo, an American school for Egyptian students, and has taught middle school science in Alexandria, Virginia, and biology at the high school level in Washington, D.C. His most recent position at Woodrow Wilson Senior High School gave him the opportunity to teach an elective conflict resolution course entitled 'Alternatives to Violence.' He has worked with youth in a variety of roles including educator, counselor, mentor, tutor, and coach and has trained at-risk youth in conflict resolution strategies as part of a gang prevention initiative. He currently works for the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation in the Athletic Programs Administration office where he runs sports programs and conflict resolution workshops for D.C. youth.

Mr. Kennedy is a member of the United Nations Association where he served as the Director for the UNA-National Capital Area's Young Professionals for International Cooperation Peace & Security Committee from 2003 to 2007. As Director he worked to develop a better understanding and cooperation between the United States and the United Nations, particularly within Congress, and promoted awareness of UN global initiatives by hosting events on topics such as child soldiers, the reintegration of former combatants, the tsunami relief efforts, domestic and international refugee policy, and the importance of religion as a vehicle for peacemaking. In his capacity as Research Assistant for the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy, he developed a Track II dialogue entitled "The Peace Game" between the United States and Iran based on the negotiation techniques of Roger Fisher and the Harvard Negotiation Project. "The Peace Game" was designed to stimulate thinking about new strategies and recommendations for building a more cooperative relationship and was received and accepted by Iranian President Ahmadinejad during his visit to the United Nations in October 2007.

He is pursuing an M.S. degree in Conflict Resolution and Analysis from George Mason University in order to raise the profile of Conflict Resolution Education (CRE) throughout the education sector. His coursework focused on processes of conflict management, mitigation, and resolution, negotiation/mediation/facilitation skills-building, and the development of conceptual frameworks for analyzing and resolving protracted social conflicts into constructive processes and sustainable peace. The author currently resides in Alexandria, Virginia with his wife, Paige Valdiserri.