THE PEER MEDIATION PROCESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the practice and the impact of peer mediation in eight secondary schools. This research is the first to investigate peer mediation in secondary schools. In doing so, it sought to give the peer mediators and other students a "voice." The students explained the peer mediation process, the effects on their personal lives, relationships, school climate and families. The thirty-three participants of the study include eight mediators, two disputants, two non-disputants, six students who refused mediation, seven teachers, one non-teacher and seven administrators. Three students refused to be interviewed. All student participants were eighteen years of age when interviewed.

The method employed is qualitative. A personal interview was conducted with each mediator and disputant to investigate what happens during the mediation process, their satisfaction with the process and the impact it is having on them and the school community. Teachers, coordinators of the peer mediation programs and administrators were also interviewed individually to get their perception of the program's impact on the mediators, disputants, other students and the school climate. Data gathered were analysed in four stages. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and the categories and themes were identified and sorted.

The findings indicate that peer mediation provides one of the best opportunities for creating peaceful schools. The study is significant because it verifies and brings to the forefront ten issues that are important to the field of peer mediation and conflict resolution. The issues are that: peer mediators can peacefully resolve conflicts and they are exemplary student leaders; peer mediation
promotes ethics, transforms lives, teaches lifelong skills, provides leadership, fellowship, growth and provides an alternative to suspension; peers trust their peers to resolve their problems; school violence is on the increase and there is a lack of support for peer mediation. The findings of this study warrant further investigation in three areas: peer mediators and other students who are between 14 and 17 years of age; the training programs; and the real cost to implement a program in a secondary school.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the two most influential people in my life.

My father,
Charles Samuels, who mothered me.

His death did not make the love between him and me die. Without his deep rooted training in personal pride, love and commitment to learning and his belief that his children can be whatever they wish to be, regardless of the obstacles, I would never have completed this work. His determination, strength, discipline and will to succeed live on in me and kept me focussed throughout this academic journey. My sincere thanks go first to him.

AND

My sister
Mrs. Daphne Heslop who has always been there for me when I needed her most.

This thesis would not have been completed without her consistent encouragement and support. Sister D, thank you so much.
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My sister, Daphne Heslop for her encouragement and support;

My colleagues and friends especially Helen Pociurko, Jennifer Amoah, Jackie Stroud, Maddy Tannahill and Brenda Sergeant;

Finally, I offer special thanks to all the participants of my study, especially the peer mediators, Michael Bator (Director of Education of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic School District), Joan Watts (Associate Director of Dufferin-Peel Catholic School District) and Michael Huckson (Principal at St Thomas Aquinas Secondary School where we worked together). Michael Bator, Director, in his capacity as Superintendent of Schools, approved my first request to attend a workshop on Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation and John Watts, Associate Director, made it possible for me to attend the conferences on Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation in the United States.

Thanks be to God for making this accomplishment possible.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Unresolved anger is creating havoc in society. Hurt is turning into hate and hate into harm. As a result, some teenagers are harming themselves, their peers and society. Indeed, some say that hatred is the root of teen violence (Toronto Star, April 24, 1999). The Columbine High School shootings of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris provide a classic example of how unresolved hate can result in harm. Dylan hated athletes because he felt that they thought they, "could walk over people and thought they were too much." On the day of the killings, Klebold and Harris shouted to their peers saying, “You’re all gonna die. This is revenge for what you’ve done to us.” Klebold and Harris shot thirteen people before shooting themselves. The special report from New York (Newsday, April 22, 1999) written by Steve Wick says, “This much seemed clear yesterday: Klebold and Harris hated with abundance. They hurled insults at Blacks, Jews and Hispanics and possessed venomous hatred for the high school’s athletes.” Pleading for an end to the U.S. violence, Dave Thomas Jefferson County district attorney said, “If we as Americans can’t seize this moment, I’m not sure what else will wake us up. I hope this is a wake up call not just to the problems in our schools but the fact that our country has a very violent culture.” (Newsday, April 22, 1999).

As a result of this and other incidences, schools have begun to consider alternative programs. Three hundred million dollars were committed to start anti-violence programs in schools. As Steve Wick remarked, “It’s as if they need to see
blood running in the hallways - nothing else will do it." The concern now is that schools could face lawsuits over student harassment (Smith, 1999). Schools are beginning to implement pro-active programs. Another program is peer mediation. Among other things, it is hoped that peer mediation will address issues that revolve around conflict and which eventually lead to more violent incidents.

In Canadian schools, prevention programs range from Zero Tolerance to Family Violence Prevention Curriculum (MacDougall, 1993, p. 23-35). Zero tolerance aims to foster respect for others and make young people, and indirectly their parents, more aware of the fact that violence is infiltrating everywhere without even being perceived (MacDougall, 1993, p. 25).

MacDougall's report suggests three types of violence prevention programs. The first program is integrated into the school curriculum. Units on family violence prevention, self-esteem, communication skills, anger management and conflict resolution are woven into courses in English, family-life skills, media studies, drama, health and guidance (p. 23). The second program is a part of a school's leadership skills training. Examples are peer helping, mediation and peacemakers' programs. These programs are described as interventionist and preventive. The third program provides services and events, suitable for in-school and out of school, that can help prevent youth crimes. Youth hotline is an example of the services that may be provided. Special events include plays, videos, retreats, workshops, student anti-violence conferences and campaigns like the White Ribbon Campaign Against Violence.

My intention is to explore the practice and the impact of peer mediation in
schools. As educators encounter violent incidents taking place inside and outside of the school environments, they become more willing to try new alternatives to traditional methods of discipline. Peer mediation is one such alternative. It is used to prevent a conflict from developing into a violent incident. Is mediation, then, the answer to better disciplined schools?

Most administrators do not know if they have chosen the right violent prevention program; some critics are not convinced of the value of mediation; and the public is demanding that educators and politicians stop the violence in schools. Educators need to hear from mediators, disputants, other students, teachers and coordinators of mediation programs to find out about mediation in schools. Educators also need to investigate the impact of these programs in secondary schools as these schools become more prone to violence. In the United States, according to Lantieri & Patti (1996, p. 28), every 11 seconds a child is reported abused or neglected; every 4 minutes a child is arrested for a violent crime; and every 98 minutes a child is killed by a gun. She also says that on a typical school day, more than 135,000 young people bring weapons to school because they do not feel safe. Violence is becoming widespread in some areas of the United States and Canada. According to Rowicki & Martin (1994), violence is becoming the number one problem in schools in the United States. Approximately 20 percent of high school students regularly carry guns and other weapons. The United States, however, is not the only place where school violence occurs. A study of an Alberta Junior High School (MacDonald et al, 1996) provides evidence of violence in some Canadian schools. The researchers say that research on school violence has slowly
gained momentum in Canada, and some educators are witness to behaviours that seriously disrupt students' learning. Since peers tend to influence their peers, peer mediation may be one method used to reduce violence in schools (Rowicki & Martin, 1994).

**Crime/Conflict in Schools/Society**

Despite the many strategies and programs that have been implemented by school and community personnel, conflict continues, and in some areas, is on the increase. In fact, it would be difficult to find an administrator who would deny that conflicts in schools are on the increase. Yet, proving it is challenging because school administrators in Ontario have only recently started to keep records of violent incidents. Also, there is no clear distinction made between the increase in crime in society and conflicts in schools. However, statistics by Hess (May 16, 1996) demonstrate an increase in the number of younger criminals. Rosemary Gartner, a Toronto sociologist who specializes in criminal law, reported in The Globe and Mail (May 16, 1996) that our best guess is that crime rates have been going up for teenagers. Shen (1997) also says that school violence has been on the rise. Both elementary and secondary school students, she says, have become increasingly violent. Nevertheless, the increase in conflicts and violence in schools and society is difficult to prove; it depends on who is preparing the statistics and for what purpose. Programs to reduce conflict are not always effective (Walker, 1995). Some schools are implementing commercially designed violence prevention programs, “off-the-shelf” packages that only add to their overcrowded curricula (Posner, 1994) and these may not fit the needs of their particular community. Furthermore,
administrators who purchase these programs may not have proof either that these
programs work, and if they do, in what type of school communities they work best.
In addition, anti-violence programs are not always successful because peer
involvement may be lacking. Skeptical that these programs can reduce violence,
Webster (1993), presents four main points against the effectiveness of conflict
resolution in schools. They will be discussed in the literature review. Current
research findings (Lindsay, 1998; Cunningham, 1997; Jones, 1997) show the need
for student involvement in programs like peer mediation.

People who are uninformed about the peer mediation process may be
skeptical because peer mediation is new to many educators. Cunningham (1997)
reports that in Canada 46% of schools had mediation programs running for one
year or less; 71% had mediation programs running for two years or less; only four
schools had programs running for as long as five years; and one high school had
the longest running program (10 years) but their program was geared more to
academic peer counselling. Critics of conflict resolution programs question whether
school-based programs for violence prevention and conflict resolution actually do
what they are supposed to do (Posner, 1994; Webster, 1993). This explains
Webster's "Unconvincing Case for School-Based Conflict Resolution Programs."
Posner (1994) claims that there's no evidence that they (violence prevention
programs) reduce serious violence and growing concern that the design of many
school-based programs is too simplistic. Educators need to differentiate between
the types of violence prevention programs that are ineffective and peer mediation
which is also a type of violence prevention program. To justify the claims that peer
mediation is effective, educators have to put the process to the test to see if there are any flaws.

**Violence Prevention, Conflict Resolution, Peer Mediation and Peaceable classroom**

Violence prevention, conflict resolution and peer mediation refer to different strategies. Yet, they have the same goal - to reduce and/or prevent violence from happening. Violence prevention connotes both a need and a program, a part of which may address conflict resolution skills. Conflict resolution, on the other hand, refers generally to strategies that enable students to handle conflicts peacefully and cooperatively outside the traditional disciplinary procedures. For example, the Toronto Board of Education school model for conflict resolution includes three strategies that fall under the term conflict resolution. The three areas are school discipline/classroom management; peer mediation/peacemakers and curriculum (Brown, 1995). Their strategies for peer mediation include development of a program model for a specific school, training peer mediators, administration of program, monitoring program development with school staff and assessment of program. Conflict resolution in education is linked in theory to democracy and citizenship, developing a peaceful world, cooperative learning, multicultural education, prejudice reduction, social justice, violence prevention and intervention, critical thinking and problem-solving, and site-based management (Schrumpf, Crawford, & Bodine, 1997; DeJong, 1994; Miller, 1994). Peer mediation is a specific form of conflict resolution utilizing students as neutral third parties in resolving disputes. A peaceful classroom or school results when the values and
skills of cooperation, communication, tolerance, positive emotional expression, and conflict resolution are taught, learned and applied consistently by students, teachers and administrators throughout the school.

This study deals with peer mediation in the Canadian context. Peer mediation is not used to resolve incidences of assault, sexual harassment or any violent incidents as is often done in the American situation (Mulvihill, G, 1997; Cohen, 1999). Peer mediation is not officially sanctioned by the Ministry of Education nor by most Ontario School Boards as a violence prevention program, but Attorney-General Charles Harnick has been considering mandatory mediation in civil suits for Ontario since 1998 (Makin, 1998). It is possible that schools may be mandated, too. Currently, the neighbourhood School Boards involved in this study have signed a protocol with their Regional and Ontario Police Departments which restricts schools regarding their involvement in certain incidents that happen in schools. Administrators MUST call the police and report violent incidents, assaults, sexual assaults, hate motivated incidents, weapons, physical assaults or the administrator may be charged for obstruction of justice. There are clear directions when the police will be called. There is no choice. Also, violence prevention programs are separate from peer mediation in Canada. Peer mediation deals with minor conflicts like gossips, boyfriend/girlfriend conflicts. Problems of violent incidents dealing with gangs, shooting, sexual harassments, as indicated above, are police issues. Most would agree that it would not be right to expose students to the danger of violent incidents. Indeed, parents would not permit their teenagers to participate in the programs.
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Most conflicts are dealt within a traditional manner in most schools. That means when there is a problem/incident the matter is identified and investigated. Information about the incident is compiled and submitted to the administrator who meets with the student(s) involved in the problem. The student is either found guilty or innocent. The administrator has a number of consequences to choose from, ranging from a formal interview to expulsion. These consequences are developed from the Code of Student Behaviour and Discipline Document (Ministry of Education and Training) which each school in Ontario is required to prepare and submit to the Minister of Education. This document was mandated in response to the increased violence in schools. It was then that the Violence-Free Schools Policy (1994) was sent to schools. Previous to this document, schools had two other Resource Guides, both published in 1986: *Discipline: Intermediate and Senior Divisions* and *Behaviour*. Despite the age of the documents, both are still regarded as useful by many educators and rated by some as the two best documents on behaviour. Unfortunately, these two documents did not lead to peace in schools. Personal experience reveals that violence continues because few administrators have the time to get to the root causes of some put-downs, gang activities, boyfriend/girlfriend conflicts and the lack of respect that some students frequently encounter. Fights between boys in their early and middle teens are usually about status and respect (Webster, 1993). This is not surprising when one considers the heightened concern for respect among young people living in ghetto areas who generally are disrespected by society and deprived of legitimate opportunities to
acquire symbols of status (Webster, 1993). In addition to the many restrictions placed on administrators when they are reporting an incident to the police, the traditional methods of disciplining students are often challenged.

As schools become new organizations, creative ways to manage discipline need to be found. It is impossible to develop new styles of organization and management while continuing to think in old ways (Morgan, 1993). Adults cannot dictate the consequences anymore. Students want a voice, or they will not listen to those who do not listen to them. Educators have four choices to keep the peace. When there is a conflict they can continue in the old ways using the traditional model, and in so doing, hold on to their power; they can give the responsibility to solve the problem to Crime Stoppers (police); they can share power before violence erupts with the peer mediators; or they can combine the services of the mediators and the police (see Table 1). Some schools have chosen to introduce peer mediation into their school community and later develop the fourth alternative.

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study then is to explore the practice and impact of peer mediation in eight Secondary Schools. However, before this can be discussed readers need to be aware of the lack of standardized measures in Canadian Schools and the lack of research in peer mediation in secondary schools.

*Lack of Standardized Measurement in Canadian Schools*

All schools are unique. Finding any study that was replicable was impossible and finding standardized instruments also proved problematic (Kmita, 1997, p.97).
Therefore, criteria set by one school are not necessarily useful for comparison with another school. This means that there is no standardized means to measure the effectiveness or non-effectiveness between school-based programs. Canadians cannot adapt the American recommended standards for school-based peer mediation programs (NIDR, 1996) because peer mediation is not as highly developed in Canada. Americans have developed standards for peer mediators, and three levels of training for coordinators. The peer mediation programs in the U.S. are developed and so many programs are mediating serious criminal offenses like assaults, prejudice, harassment, sexual harassment, and homophobia and in schools peer mediators mediate conflicts between students and teachers, students and their parents and even youth gangs (Cohen, 1999). In Canada peer mediation is not introduced in most secondary schools (Cunningham, 1997), and there are not many qualified trainers in peer mediation for the secondary school programs.

Attempts at research and evaluation in the area of conflict resolution and peer mediation lack an agreement regarding suitable measure of success or failure and how these measures might be used (Maxwell, 1989). Not being able to explain the successes and failures also make it difficult to sell the benefits of the program to critics and others, as more instruments for program evaluation become available, the benefits to students and to the school climate will become increasingly more apparent (Lam, 1989). Peer mediation is still in its infancy (Shulman, 1996) in some schools.
Lack of Research in Peer Mediation

Peer mediation and conflict resolution programs in schools have been challenged for the lack of research, evaluation, and theory-building associated with the programs (Burton, 1995; Kmitta, 1997; Storie, 1995). Little empirical research and evaluation have been done in Canada relating to these programs. The work, as stated earlier, that has been done is mostly unpublished (Storie, 1995; Kmitta, 1997) and was conducted in elementary schools. This creates a problem for the evaluation of peer mediation. John Burton (1990) maintains that more research, and more critical analysis, must precede any satisfactory evaluation. Peer mediation programs were implemented by practitioners and others who used the “success” of the American programs and their own professional judgment to convince schools that these programs really worked (Storie, 1995). Only two Canadian studies are published. One is the Toronto Board of Education research “An Evaluation of Conflict Resolution Programs at the Secondary Level at the Toronto Board of Education 1993-1994: The Evolution of a Model” (Brown, 1995) and the other is the “Peer Mediation: Survey of Ontario Schools” (Cunningham, 1997).

US researchers, especially Johnson & Johnson (1966) and Jones et al (1997), are very helpful in assisting the promotion of peer mediation in schools. Johnson & Johnson (1996), for example, reaffirm what needs to be known about peer mediation. They see the need for (1) research to investigate whether the programs are needed, (2) whether or not they are effective (3) as well as identifying the problems of research in peer mediation. They have also identified
methodological and conceptual problems. Tricia Jones (1998) provides current research on peer mediation. Her two-year research project investigated the impact of cadre and whole-school peer mediation programs in three communities, at all levels of education (elementary, middle and high school). Multiple surveys were sent to 430 peer mediators, 5400 control students, 1400 conflict training students and 1225 teachers/administrative staff. The findings reveal many positive effects of peer mediation in schools but the direct voices of the students are not included in the report and valuable opinions could be lost through the indirect approach and the reframing.

A final concern with the research on peer mediation is that there is also a possibility that some research on peer mediation may be repeated and/or not developed since no one knows for sure what has already been done and what remains to be done. More qualitative research is urgently needed in the area of peer mediation at the secondary level to evaluate the process. The mediators, disputants, other students, coordinators of the programs and teachers need to have a voice. This study intends to fill this gap.

The specific areas that this study explores are as follows:

**Pre-Mediation**
How are students selected (cadre program)?
How are students trained?

**Referrals and Organization**
Which conflicts are sent to mediation?
How?
By whom?

**Mediation**
What happens in mediation process?
What kinds of incidents are sent to mediation?
Who decides that peer mediation should occur?
What happens if mediation is refused? What are the options?

Post-Mediation: Outcomes
What are the outcomes of peer mediation?
- personal
- student
- school
How does peer mediation affect
- mediators
- disputants
- non-disputants
- teachers
- administrators

(See Conceptual Framework chart)

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PEER MEDIATION PROCESS

This study investigates the peer mediation process. More specifically, it explores four areas of peer mediation: pre-mediation, referral of conflicts for mediation, mediation and post-mediation. The category pre-mediation investigates the selection and training of the peer mediators; referrals of conflicts for mediation investigate how disputants get to mediation, which conflicts are sent to mediation, and by whom; the mediation category investigates what happens in the mediation and the post-mediation category investigates the outcome/impact of the peer mediation program on the school climate, the mediators, disputants, non-disputants, teachers and administrators.

This is the first study to investigate the peer mediation process in secondary schools. While Moore (1996) provides practical strategies to commercial, legal, family, divorce, labor/management, discrimination, multi-ethnic and community
Table 1

PEER MEDIATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCIDENT VICE PRINCIPAL</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>MEDIATION</th>
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disputes he makes minimal reference to education. Through Moore’s mediation process is similar to peer mediation, secondary schools need their own version because schools do not have the qualified mediators, the time, facilities and money to adapt the strategies as recommended by Moore (1996). Furthermore, the length of time for the process that he recommends does not fit into the school day. Educators need to look at what schools are currently doing to decide on what process is best suited for secondary schools. Previous studies concentrate on the effects of peer mediation on the peer mediators (Nims, 1997; Ellsworth, 1993; Pastorino, 1990; White, 1996; Riner, 1998), the effects on disputants (Anticoli, 1997; Kolan, 1999); the effects of school programs (Nance, 1995; Theberge, 1996; Guy, 1998); effect on school community (Davenport, 1997; Denmark, 1995; Engert, 1996; Patti, 1996; White, 1996; Finley, 1997; Parrinelli, 1994; Baker-Jackson, 1998); effectiveness of the selection process (Cordasco, 1996); training (Dudley, 1994; Sweeney, 1995; Lupton-Smith, 1996; Winston, 1996; Nelson, 1997) and conflict resolution (Vermillion, 1989; Nelson-Haynes, 1995; Knittka, 1997).

In order for critics, and those who wish to implement a peer mediation program, to understand, trust and accept peer mediation as a strategy that they can implement in their school, the process of peer mediation in secondary schools must be investigated and analysed. This study adds to the findings of two new peer mediation projects on peer mediation in schools. The first is the Peer Mediation Survey of Ontario schools by Cunningham (1997) which piloted peer mediation programs, developed training materials and pursued follow-up studies on the
program's effectiveness in middle school contexts. The second study is the Comprehensive Peer Mediation Evaluation Project by Jones (1997). This two-year research project by Jones investigated the impact of cadre and whole school peer mediation programs in three communities, at all levels of education (elementary, middle, high school) within cultural diverse student population. She looked at students' conflict attitudes and behaviours, school climate, and the use of mediation as a dispute resolution process. My study investigates a cadre (peer mediation only) program and is specific to the peer mediation process in secondary schools in my neighbourhood.

Peer mediation is not new to me. As a mediator and a trainer of peer mediators, I know a good deal about the theory and practice of mediation. I have been the coordinator of three peer mediation programs in three secondary schools. I am an advocate of the process because I have seen its positive impact on the school culture. My knowledge and experiences with peer mediation will surely have an impact on the study. However, I can accept the outcomes because I genuinely want to find out what is happening during the peer mediation process in secondary schools. I will, therefore, rely on the words of the participants. My hope is that this study will provoke thought and lead administrators to think about how they currently administer consequences, what options are possible and available, and what methods are in the best interest of the students.
Conceptual Framework of the Peer Mediation Process in Secondary Schools

Table 2

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<th>Stage 1</th>
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<td>b) Training</td>
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<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Referral and Organization</th>
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<td>a) What conflicts are sent to mediation?</td>
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<td>b) How?</td>
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<td>c) By whom?</td>
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<th>Stage 3</th>
<th>Mediation</th>
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<td>a) What happens in mediation?</td>
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<td>b) What happens if a student refuses mediation?</td>
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<td>c) What are the options?</td>
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<th>Stage 4</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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<td>How does peer mediation affect</td>
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<td>a) peer mediators</td>
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<td>b) disputants</td>
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<td>c) non-disputants</td>
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<td>d) teachers</td>
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<td>e) administrators?</td>
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Definition of terms

To ensure that all readers understand the terms as used in this thesis the following definitions are provided.

**Cadre program versus whole school programs**
Cadre program is used to refer to a selected group of students who are trained to become peer mediators. They operate independently as opposed to a school wide peer mediation program. The cadre program includes regular training meetings after school which is intended for peer mediators only. On the other hand, a school-wide program offers conflict resolution and peer mediation education as a part of the school curriculum.

**Conflict**
A disagreement between two or more people.

**Conflict resolution**
The strategies used to resolve conflicts e.g. peer mediation.

**Disputant**
The person who has a conflict/disagreement with another.

**Intrapersonal**
Conflict developed from within an individual.

**Interpersonal**
Conflict developed between individuals.

**Mediation**
The process that facilitates a neutral and impartial third party to assist two or more people (called disputants) to resolve their conflict.

**Mediation success**
Defined in terms of the number of mediation that has been successfully completed evidenced by the signing of a mediation contract between the disputing parties. Also evident by the documentation of the satisfaction of the agreement between disputants two weeks to one month after the mediation. (Lam, 1989)

**Peer Coordinator**
The person who is responsible for the training and management of the peer mediators.
Peer Helpers/Peer Tutor
Students trained to help their peers with their academic work.

Peer mediation process
The stages of resolving a conflict.

Peer mediator
Students trained to help their peers (disputants) resolve their conflicts (see mediation).

Violence
Actual or threatened use of physical force toward another

Win-Win situation
A situation were no one is declared the winner or the loser. All parties benefit in some way with the final agreement.

The purpose of the study is to investigate what happens during and after mediation. I hope that educators and others who read this study can make an informed decision about implementing a peer mediation program in their school.

This section gives an overview of the peer mediation process in secondary schools. It explains the current situations that exist in schools which create the need for a peer mediation program in schools and it gives a description of the conceptual framework of the peer mediation process. The literature review which follows conveys the current research in the field of conflict resolution and peer mediation in secondary schools. It discusses the four stages of peer mediation: pre-mediation, referral and organization, mediation and post-mediation (outcomes and effects). In order to present a balanced account of the peer mediation process, contradictory evidence and a critique of peer mediation and conflict resolution are also provided. The third chapter explains how the research was conducted and the process used to select participants for the study. Chapters Four to Seven report the findings of
the study and Chapter Eight discusses the outcomes and value of peer mediation to the mediators. Chapter Nine is the discussion and the final chapter is the conclusion.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review examines what researchers in the field of conflict resolution and peer mediation have identified about peer mediation in schools. Twenty-nine doctoral dissertations were published between 1989 and 1999 on peer mediation that are of relevance to this study (see Appendix A) but there is little in the literature about the peer mediation process in secondary schools. This study is the first to investigate the peer mediation process in secondary schools and the first to hear directly from the peer mediators. However, researchers have attempted to understand peer mediation from a variety of positions such as training, evaluation, effects, perceptions and selection.

My research of the literature has three distinct sections. Section A provides evidence that challenges peer mediation. The criticism of peer mediation by scholars in the field of conflict resolution and peer mediation pertains to listening, reframing, power, neutrality, mediation and violence, mediation and social justice and mediation as a political strategy. Section B begins with a description of the four stages of a peer mediation process that emerged from the literature: pre-mediation, referral and organization, mediation and outcomes/effects. It delves into the selection, training, types of conflicts sent to mediation. It explores how students trained as peer mediators mediate and the effects of the peer mediation process on the peer mediators, disputants (those in conflict), teachers, administrators and on the school climate.
In summary, readers will be exposed to research findings in four areas. The first is an explanation of peer mediation; second, an overview of the literature for and against peer mediation; third, information about peer mediation in schools, and the fourth, is the impact of peer mediation on schools.

**What is Peer Mediation?**

Peer mediation may take the form of a cadre program or whole school programs or even a whole class approach. A cadre program refers to a group of students who are selected and trained to become peer mediators for their school. They operate independently like a club. Their activities impact only the mediators who are involved in the program and those students who are referred to mediation. A whole class approach is different. Teachers may choose to train the students in their class how to mediate and have the trained students resolve conflicts that happen in their class. On the other hand, the school administration may see the need to include conflict resolution and peer mediation skills as a part of the academic curriculum. In addition, conflict resolution training may be offered to all staff and there may also be a peer mediation program operating after school. This form of program impacts the school community and is therefore referred to as a whole school program. Jones (1997, p.9) conducted a comprehensive peer mediation evaluation project of elementary, middle and high schools. A total of 8,475 peer mediators, control students, conflict training students and teachers/administrative staff were involved in this study. She reports that both cadre and whole school programs yield significant benefits. Also that cadre programs yield better individual outcomes while whole school programs yield a better climate.
outcome. My study deals specifically with the cadre (peer mediation only) programs. Researchers (Rowicki, 1994; Jones, 1997; Engert, 1996; Anticoli, 1997; Davenport, 1997; Roy, 1994; Koch, 1988; Johnson & Johnson, 1996) assert the effectiveness of letting children resolve their own conflicts in such contexts.

**An Overview of Literature For and Against Peer Mediation**

Researchers have conflicting views about the value of peer mediation. Mediation is criticized for disempowering the disputants by allowing the mediators' to intervene under the disguise of neutrality (Nims, 1997). Nims describes mediation as a one-shot solution to solving problems which causes others to be dependent on the mediators to solve their problems. Another study reports that the implementation of a peer mediation program does not influence self-concept or behaviour over a short period of time (Miller, 1994).

Some people present other evidence against certain practices of mediation. They criticize the concept of active listening as a gimmick (Duryea, 1996); they are suspicious of mediators reframing the language of the disputants during mediation (Lam, Rifkin & Townley, 1989; Kiely & Cray, 1986); they question the representation that disputants are receiving through the mediators (Garcia, 1995); they distrust the power dynamics of the mediators over the disputants (Cormick et al, 1996; Kolb, 1994; Chornenki, 1997; Kolan, 1999; Moore, 1996); they are not sure that neutrality exists (Rifkin, Millen & Cobb, 1991); they question that mediation can prevent violence (Kmita, 1997, p. 8); some have concerns about mediation and social justice issues (McCormick, 1997; Lam, Rifkin and Townley, 1989; Wing, 1998) and for some mediation is used as a political strategy (Webster, 1993). Each
criticism will be briefly addressed.

**Critiques of Peer Mediation**

Some people doubt the practice of active listening (Duryea, 1996). Duryea depends mediation but she addresses some concerns that some people have with concept of active listening especially in a cross-cultural context. They ask: “Does active listening really work? Is it a gimmick? What about intercultural situations?” Those who are using active listening for the first time describe active listening as artificial, irritating, and capable of escalating the conflict. Mediators, according to Duryea (1996), claim that they do not know what the feelings are of those in conflict and they are fearful of alienating them by making wrong assumptions or guesses. In some instances, mediators are concerned about misinterpretation because cross-cultural communication is complex and therefore active listening may be more difficult.

Reframing is taking a negative or blaming statement and re-wording it to identify and emphasize positive goal(s) and or underlying concerns or interests (Duryea, 1996). Duryea claims that reframing aims to take the “sting” or blaming out of the negative statement, while not downplaying the intensity of the feeling behind the statement. Reframing has been described as “the tool by which mediators move parties towards settlement; it is the means by which shared interpretation is achieved and ... has been seen as a necessary precursor to resolution” (Bodtker & Jameson, 1997, p. 240).

Some people question the reframing that takes place during mediation. They argue that reframing is a complex skill that develops over time, and if it is done well,
reframing can make a vital difference to the progress of a discussion. However, it can also provide an opportunity for mediator manipulation and influence. For example, it sometimes incorporates a different perspective from the one originally articulated by the disputant and it can be emotionally disconnected from the actual statement that preceded it (or simply “Pollyanna-ish”) and ideas may be resented or rejected by the parties who feel patronized or manipulated (Duryea, 1996). In addition, the language used, and especially the use of the concept reframing, can influence the type of agreement the parties reach (Lam, Rifkin & Townley, 1989; Kiely & Crary, 1986) and help an insensitive mediator to overlook the pain and suffering by the victim of the injustice (McCormick, 1997); and fairness and equality can be left unrecognized (Lam, Rifkin & Townley, 1989). In addition, mediation emphasizes words like resolution and agreement and the focus is on resolving the conflict (Kiely & Crary, 1986). This can work to the disadvantage of the disputants.

Mediation aims to empower disputants so that they can represent themselves. However, disputants have the option to have others speak on their behalf. Disputants can be represented in three different ways (Garcia, 1995). The mediator can represent the disputant’s position by repeating or rephrasing or by making statements consistent with the disputant’s position which may go beyond rephrasing what was actually said or by creating his/her own arguments, without specific reference to what the disputant has stated. In the latter case, the mediator is not simply representing the position of the disputant, but taking the place of the disputant and acting as a first party to the dispute rather than a neutral third party; this method disrupts the disputant’s self representation (Garcia, 1995).
Some people question whether mediation is appropriate where one party holds disproportionately more power in the bargaining relationship (Cormick et al, 1996). They say that this inequality promotes the abuse of power. Davis says, “Racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression are a reality. Abuses of power abound. Cynical uses of mediation can flourish easily in a society which refuses to address its own inequities (Kolb, 1994, p. 259). The problem is that power comes from many sources. Mayer (1987) identifies ten different sources of power. They are formal power (the power of a parent or a school principal), expert/information power (expertise or information about a particular area), associated power (association with people in power), resource power (control over valued resources like money, materials, labour, goods and services), procedural power (control over the procedures by which decisions are made and not over the decisions themselves), sanction power (perceived ability to inflict harm or interfere with a party’s ability to realize his or her interest), nuisance power (ability to cause discomfort to a party), habitual power (the power of the status quo), moral power (widely held values) and personal power (derived from a variety of personal attributes). However, there is a distinction between the many forms of power. Mediators can choose to have “power over” or “power with” the disputants (Chornenki cited in Macfarlane, ed, 1997). This allows the mediator to either disempower the overly powerful party or empower the powerless party. The claim that peer mediation could be violent to the disputant who is in the weaker power position can be interpreted as power over others (Kolan, 1999). On the other hand, although the mediators are neutral in relation to the parties and generally impartial toward the substantive outcome, they are directly
involved in influencing disputants toward settlement (Moore, 1996).

Some critics doubt that neutrality is possible. Neutrality is difficult to analyse and there is little research or theory to support the position on neutrality (Rifkin, Millen & Cobb, 1991). Rifkin, Millen and Cobb say that mediators are very adept at describing their practice in terms of neutrality, but they are much less able to theoretically or empirically account for it. The critics describe the opening stages of mediation, when the mediator usually identifies him/herself as neutral, as the paradox of neutrality. They argue that any objective notion of neutrality is inherently flawed by biases and so they present the struggle of mediators to be both neutral (as a means) and to practice neutrality (as an end) simultaneously. They describe the mediation process as a cycle of paradox.

There are four stages of the paradox of the mediation process (Rifkin, Miller & Cobb, 1991). Stage one of the mediation process begins with an introduction followed by a description of the process and the structure of the process. The paradox occurs when the mediator identifies him/herself as "neutral" (impartial) and presents him/herself as present simply to listen and not to influence the disputants' explication of the case. The second stage of the paradox emerges after the disputants describe their view of the conflict. The mediators, they claim, often take private caucus to determine which areas of the case ought to be pursued and how to continue the session, and they also decide if they should hold private sessions and in what order. The third stage of paradox happens when the disputants elaborate on their positions. Then, the mediator must facilitate disclosure to attain the information they judge to be significant (Davis, 1986, p. 23 in Mc Farlane, 1999,
The critics of the process say that is practising equidistance which contradicts the practice of impartiality. The fourth stage of the paradox takes place when the disputants are led to believe that they can expect a personal, supportive relationship, sometimes in the form of explicit request for support of disputant’s position. The critics argue that when the “supported alliance becomes evident to mediators they are pressured by the definition of impartiality, to deny personal validation of judgment and find it necessary to reassert their impartial stance, thereby completing the cycle of the paradox and forming an interactive loop (p. 409). They believe that each step stands as a contradiction to each other and the facilitation of disclosure contradicts the denial of alliance because the disputants receive mixed messages that confuse their relationship with the mediators. On the one hand, the mediators encourage certain aspects of disclosure, suggesting an allied, supportive relationship; on the other hand, the mediators present unbiased persons, suggesting an unallied, formal relationship” (p. 409). They conclude that the mediators are engaged in a process of sending contradictory messages to the disputants.

Some say that peer mediation prevents violence (Powell & Hawkins, 1996; Kolan, 1995) or is an alternative to violence (Morse & Ivey, 1996). On the other hand, there is the belief that because mediation occurs once a dispute has arisen, the process is considered an intervention and not a prevention (Kmita, 1997, p.8). Kmita blames researchers, like himself, who have tried to make the empirical connection between youth conflict and youth violence. There is false hope, in his opinion, that school-based conflict resolution programs by themselves with be
sufficient in preventing school violence.

There are three criticisms about mediation's impact on social justice. The first is that the neutrality of mediators during the process may help to perpetuate social injustice. Moreover, moral wrong is not negotiable (McCormick, 1997) and therefore issues like racism should not be mediated (Wing, 1998). The second is that mediation can replicate oppression (Wing, 1998). Disputants may not challenge the power imbalance (Wing, 1998; McCormick, 1997). For example, European mediators may tell some disputants of colour that racism can be mediated but when they mediate racism they can avoid the real issues or even the topic (Wing, 1997). In addition, certain groups of people face obstacles that others do not experience in telling a story. For example gender, age, racial and cultural differences may affect one's ability to construct a story that is recognized by others as coherent (Rifkin, Miller & Cobb, 1991, p. 408). The third concern is the training of the mediators. The mediation training model in the United States is a product of the dominant culture and so the mediators are agents of that culture (McCormick, 1997) and the training is a Western/Anglo labour model (Wing, 1998). Furthermore, under the system of institutionalized racism and injustice in the United States the perpetrator often is not made to see that he or she is repeatedly acting oppressively (McCormick, 1997; Wing, 1998). These researchers say that discrimination and abuse can be easily overlooked. In addition, applying the concept of “one size fits all” to the training of peer mediators may be insensitive and disrespectful of cultural differences and in the end may promote social injustice.

Webster (1993) believes that peer mediation is a political strategy, a waste
of money and of time. He says that thousands of teachers, counsellors, health educator and volunteers spend countless hours in financially strapped schools delivering programs to students. His recommendation is that these efforts may be better used in ways that are more likely to prevent violence or that have other socially desirable pay off. He notes that conflict resolution and peer mediation programs have not been proven to work, intrudes on academic teaching time and are not cost-effective.

Some other researchers also warn that peer mediation is getting too much credit for the reduction in suspensions. Araki, Takeshita & Kafomoti, (1990, p. 47) found no change in the rates of suspension in three Honolulu schools (p. 47). A study of grade 10 students, conducted at six inner city high schools, also resulted in no significant differences in the students' knowledge about violence, attitude toward handling conflicts, and fighting. Others caution that the lower number of suspensions and lower number of fights cannot be attributed solely to peer mediation programs (Schrumf, Crawford & Usadel, 1991; Kolan, 1999, p. 47). The self reporting nature of the data on effectiveness of peer mediation programs (Johnson & Johnson, 1996) and the vagueness of the measure of effectiveness, among other methodological problems with the research, makes it difficult to compare these studies. There is a lack of proof for many statements made about peer mediation because few studies are conducted on how well programs have been implemented and how they have continued over several years. In addition, the evaluation criteria for peer mediation programs need to be reviewed and restructured in order to provide consistent measures of progress (Kolan, 1999,
p.50). The literature suggests that peer mediation programs are seen by those in authority as a good thing to implement in a school but in principle there is no school-wide commitment to staff development of conflict resolution skills or the peaceable school model (Finley, 1997). This helps some to believe that peer mediation is a political strategy.

**PEER MEDIATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

The framework below presents a way of thinking about the peer mediation process. It is my proposed model of a structure that can be used in secondary schools. The model makes it possible to focus on the four specific objectives of the study: pre-mediation, referral, mediation, and post-mediation.

**PRE-MEDIATION (stage 1)**

This section describes the eight methods used to select students for the peer mediation program and the training that the mediators receive. However, except for the work of Kmita (1997), limited research has been done on the training of peer mediators.

**Selection of Students**

The selection process of peer mediators is very important to the success of the peer mediation. According to Downe, Attmann & Nysetvold (1986, p. 360), the selection process is perhaps the most important determinant in the overall success of a program for peer helpers. It is important because the students who are selected as peer mediators need to be respected by their peers in order for the disputants to trust them with their secrets. As Koch & Miller (1987) explain, the process of
selection of a mediator or mediator team is based primarily on the need to facilitate the disputing parties’ trust in the mediator or mediators. Experience teaches that if the mediators are not mature enough to keep information confidential, make the disputants feel that they are listened to and appreciated and are not confident about what they are doing, the peer mediation program may fail.

There are five main factors to consider when selecting mediators in a school setting. The program needs positive and contrapositive (negative) leaders, representatives from all grades, representatives from all groups in the school community, students with different academic abilities and talents and students with varied personality traits. Practising mediators also believe that the group of mediators must also represent the diversity of student population in terms of race, gender, school achievement, behaviour, extracurricular interests, group membership, and residential neighbourhood (Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine, 1997). They explain that if only those with exemplary school behaviour and high academic achievements are selected, many of the students will not see the program as representing their peer group and therefore will not choose to participate in mediation. They say the personal qualifications of the peer mediator should include respect of peers, skills in communication, leadership ability, sense of responsibility, trustworthiness and fairness as well as empathy. Personal qualities like being dependable, honest, intelligent, punctual, responsible, mature, approachable, nonjudgmental, sensitive and capable of maintaining confidentiality are also important. According to Johnson & Johnson (1995, p.7) a good mediator is impartial, neutral, nonjudgmental, patient, understanding, imaginative.
knowledgeable, analytical, respectful and trustworthy. One student might not have all the qualities but researchers find that exposure to the training program helps students to grow in some of these areas. For example, researchers found that trained mediators were rated as significantly more effective in establishing and in enforcing rules during the mediation session (O’Connor et al., 1995); their psychological health and self-esteem tend to increase (Johnson & Johnson, 1996); and at all educational levels, mediators are able to enact and utilize the behaviour skills taught in training (Jones, 1997).

There is value in the diversity in the recruitment, selection, and training of peer mediators. Researchers in this area claim that inclusion of a cross-section of the student population promises to make the mediation program more appealing and responsive to a larger portion of the student body (Cordasco, 1996; Dejong, 1992 cited by Cordasco, 1996, p. 75). Some say that mediators also benefit because they are exposed to different perspectives, different cultures, develop a repertoire of skills that will broaden their awareness and sensitivity, and will extend these skills into other facets of their lives (Day-Vines et al., 1996). It is also believed that regardless of the method of selection, three common principles should be present in all programs in order for it to be successful. They are student involvement, school staff involvement and the selection of mediators that represent a cross-section of the student population with respect to gender, race, class achievement level, etc. (DeJong, 1992 p.14 cited by Cordasco, 1996, p.75).

However, the selection process varies. The Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution suggests that nominations for the selection process should be broadly
solicited from staff and students, including self-nominations. In the case of self-nomination the teachers may veto nomination (Woolner, 1992). The Illinois Institute also believes that one of the most effective selection processes is a lottery. They say lottery selection is perceived as an opportunity, whereas selection by criteria can be perceived as a personal risk.

Students are also selected in a variety of ways (Table 3). However, the two most common methods of selection are application and interview, and sociometric selection (Cordasco, 1996, p.19). The application and interview method requires that the student fills out an application form and attends an interview. In the sociometric selection, peers select peers. The schools in Cardasco’s study selected either one of the methods or both. Cordasco (1996) also says that no research could be found comparing the success of one method of selection to the other in reference to producing a more effective mediator and that little or no information existed to explain the chosen selection method that was employed. Class selection is also a method that some educators use to choose peer mediators (Davenport, 1997; Scrumpf, Crawford & Usadel, 1991). A survey of peer mediation in Ontario schools found that the main criterion for the selection of mediators was staff judgment. Cunningham (1997) reports the following about the selection process:

- Staff selected mediators in 85% of the programs surveyed.
- Selection of peers was used in only 15% of the other divisions K5-OAC.
- 55% of the secondary schools selected teams for gender balance.
- 46% of the secondary schools selected for culture balance.
- Secondary schools had a greater proportion of visible minorities on their mediation teams than in their school population.

Some practitioners also recommend that the selection processes for peer mediators
should include both student and staff nominations as well as application (Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine, 1997, p.76-77).

Table 3

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<td>2. Sociometric selection</td>
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<td>3. Staff judgment</td>
<td>Cunningham, (1997)</td>
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<td>5. Self nomination</td>
<td>Woolner, (1992)</td>
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<td>6. Lottery</td>
<td>Illinois Institute</td>
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<td>8. Sociometric, staff, self nomination= interview</td>
<td>Current study</td>
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The Training of Students: skill development

The following section reviews what is known about the training of students to become peer mediators and discusses the research findings on training. First are the findings of Kmitta (1997), second is the research by Cunningham (1997) who investigated the training models used in Canadian schools and the third section describes two other training programs: The Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution Training Program and Project SMART. The differences between trained and untrained students are also discussed.

Many researchers have investigated the impact of the training of peer mediators, but except for the findings of Kmitta (1997), little is known about the
training itself. Brown, (1995, p. 13) for example, refers to conflict resolution courses at the school level but fails to say what the training includes. Johnson and Johnson (1996) are also vague. In discussing what students should learn, they say that when students are involved in long-term, ongoing relationships, the most important conflict strategy for them to use is integrative negotiations in which joint benefit is considered over personal gain (p. 476). Their text, “Teaching Students to be Peacemakers” although useful is not, in my view, very helpful for secondary school students and does not sufficiently describe the training of peer mediators. The manual of Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1991) provides the best information about the training of peer mediators.

The training process has not been adequately assessed. Kmitta (1997) and Kolan (1999) found that the programs in their study were all different. Kmitta (p. 61), evaluated three school-based programs: the Students’ Creative Response to Conflict, Cooperative Discipline and Peer Mediation but only peer mediation will be discussed in this review. The peer mediation program has four objectives (p. 62). The first is to develop an understanding of conflict and how to positively manage it; second, understand and learn the mediation process; third, develop the necessary listening and communication skills to become an effective mediator; and fourth, foster cooperation and mutual support among the peer mediators during and after training. Kmitta (1997) evaluated twelve public schools between 1992-1995. The programs were offered by the Centre for Peace Education, Cincinnati, Ohio and none of the programs in the study were replicated. This makes it difficult to generalize on the training offered in schools but some general research questions
can help us to understand aspects of the training.

**Research Findings on Training (US)**

Kmita’s (1997) research topic is “Peaceful Possibilities: Three Years of Evaluative Research of School-based Conflict Resolution Programs.” He used quantitative and qualitative methods to conduct his investigation. His research reveals the fragmentation of the theories of school-based conflict resolution program development. In his study of school-based conflict resolution programs, he asks four questions which are important to this study. The first question has two parts. He asked, “What do the Centre for Peace Education's (CPE) conflict resolution programs teach? Life skills to help people resolve their differences nonviolently, or is conflict resolution training a new form of obedience training?” (p. 97). He found that The CPE’s conflict resolution programs are not a new way of obedience training and that they teach life skills to help people resolve their conflicts non-violently (p. 69).

The second question was, “Were the conflict resolution skills taught by the Centre for Peace Education integrated into day to day academic curriculum?” He found that the conflict resolution skills were not integrated into the curriculum and that the data reveals that the CPE’s conflict resolution training had a negative effect on the integration of the conflict resolution programs into the day-to-day curriculum. The third question was about classroom discipline. He asked, “Did the Centre for Peace Education conflict resolution programs reduce classroom discipline problems?” He found that the CPS’s conflict resolution programs demonstrated a marginal performance in reducing classroom discipline problems. The fourth
question was “Did the Centre for Peace Education conflict education program prevent or reduce violence?” The finding was that the CPE’s conflict resolution programs had no influence in reducing or preventing incidents of violence.

Cunningham (1997) says that a wide range of different mediation models is used in Ontario schools but the efficacy of these models has not been established.

The following are the training models that he identifies:

1. 61% based their program on at least one of the 13 different published manuals
2. 26% used both published manuals and their own models
   - 38% of these used more than 2 manuals in addition to their own model
3. 11% used their own model only.

Little research has been published about the contents of the training programs for the peer mediators. A training manual for the Toronto School District includes skills in communication, active listening, “I” messages, body language as well as mediation strategies (Kearns et al, 1992). Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine (1991) describe in their manual the training that the student mediators and the program team members receive. It covers seven areas:

1. Understanding conflict
2. Principles of conflict resolution
3. Social and cultural diversity and conflict resolution
4. Mediation process and skills
5. Program organization and operation
6. Role of peer mediation in the school
7. Rationale for peer mediation.

They say that it is important for those who train students to have had actual mediation experience, because mediation is not something that can be learned from reading a book or following a step-by-step curriculum guide (p. 61). This explains why the content and the training over a period of time are important to developing
well-equipped peer mediators.

The Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution Training Program for student mediators includes twelve to fifteen hours of basic training and twelve to fifteen hours of additional advanced training (Crawford & Bodine, 1996). Basic training activities include helping candidates to understanding the mediation process. The advanced training includes bias awareness, social/cultural diversity, advanced communication, uncovered hidden interests, dealing with anger, caucusing, negotiation, and group problem-solving. Students who complete the basic training can mediate most disputes between peers. The advanced training strengthens their abilities to use the mediation process and expands their understanding of diversity with regard to conflict resolution.

The Project SMART (School-Based Mediation program sponsored by The Victim Services Agency, NY) program offers an intensive twenty-hour training program twice during the school year for students, school personnel, and parents interested in becoming SMART mediators. The training course teaches students and adults fact-gathering techniques, note-taking and questioning skills, and how to structure mediation hearings, identify and prioritize issues in disputes, and write mediation agreements. The role-playing exercises are used to help participants analyse their own responses to conflict, understand and express their own feelings, and sharpen the mediation skills and techniques learned in the training. In addition, Project SMART has begun to offer an advanced training to a select group of experienced mediators in racial and cultural dispute resolution. The training component consists of lectures, discussions, role-plays, and group exercises to help
explore racial and cultural differences and the role that mediation might play in resolving possible conflicts. Students are selected from each school to attend joint training with mediators from other schools to provide them with an opportunity to work with peers from diverse backgrounds (Moore & Whipple, 1988).

**Untrained students**

Those who research peer mediation in schools see a difference between students who do not have and those who have peer mediation and conflict resolution skills. Johnson & Johnson (1996), for example, reviewed the research of Conflict Resolution and Peer mediation in elementary and secondary schools. They claim, that usually, students react negatively to conflicts when they do not have peer mediation training. Those without training are more withdrawn, suppressed, rely on force/coercion, are intimidated and are more involved with distributive (win-lose) negotiations (Johnson & Johnson et al, 1995). Other researchers found that untrained students either avoided conflict or confronted the other person (Peterson & Peterson, 1990). For some untrained students, a conflict means “fight or flee” (Davis, 1994).

Secondary schools with peer mediation programs have developed methods to select peer mediators but it is not known if the training is available to all students. Are reluctant, shy, marginal students (academic or otherwise), new immigrants, students who are always in conflicts, bullies and students at risk of dropping out of school encouraged to become peer mediators? Are the students selected already empowered leaders who are recognized? If it is only the academically gifted students who are trained to become peer mediators, then that would defeat the
purpose of the program. These are some of the issues that need to be explored in order to better understand the impact of peer mediation in secondary schools.

**REFERRAL AND ORGANIZATION (stage 2)**

The referral process keeps the peer mediation program alive. Without referrals there would be no need for mediators and the program. Peer mediation often relies on vice principals for referrals (Brown, 1995) or in some cases, members of a school community may complete a peer mediation request form to request mediation (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997, p. 88). These forms are kept in areas that are accessible to many students, like classrooms, the main office and bulletin boards. The mediations are scheduled soon after the request is made and the actual mediation may take place before, during and after school. This means that some mediators may mediate while class in being conducted, during the participants' spare time or during their lunch. Mediators may be scheduled to mediate a particular case or be assigned based on the period that he or she is free to mediate. Regardless when the mediators mediate, they have the right to refuse to mediate if they know the disputant and have some relationship with him or her, or the age or grade is not appropriate. Knowing what to avoid when assigning mediators to a mediation is very important and this is perhaps why Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1991, p.84) recommend that the referral process should be a part of the in-service. This, however, is not a common practice in all schools.

In some schools where there is a peer mediation program, the administrators may have additional choices of consequences (Table 1). When an incident is reported to an administrator, he or she will investigate the incident and may choose
to give a traditional consequence like suspension, send the students to mediation or call the police because not all conflicts can be mediated. Indeed, some issues may not be appropriate to mediate at all. Furthermore, schools in this study have signed a protocol with the police to report certain incidents to them. If the conflict goes to mediation and the conflict is successfully mediated, the process ends. But if mediation fails to reach an agreement that both disputing students can agree to, then the conflict is returned to the administrator who may end up giving a traditional consequence. On the other hand, cases referred to the police, depending on the type of incident, depending on the danger inflicted and/or the safety issue involved, may entail charges and/or be referred to the school’s mediation program. Traditional strategies like suspensions could again become an option, but suspensions are becoming less popular in some school communities. For example, schools in Florida are re-evaluating traditional approaches to discipline because the practice of out-of-school suspensions has come under scrutiny and has been linked to negative outcomes like academic failure, negative school attitude and drop out (Davenport, 1997, p.7). As a result, some schools are turning to peer mediation programs to help them resolve conflicts in their schools. However, mediation has its limitations.

**Types of Conflicts sent to Mediation**

Only certain types of conflicts are sent to peer mediation. This is because mediation is a pro-active program and it would be irresponsible to expose the peer mediators to dangerous conflicts. Verbal disputes about rumour and gossip are the types of conflicts that occur most frequently in schools (Brown, 1995 p. 35) and
these are the conflicts that peer mediators mediate. The conflicts are usually between boyfriend/girlfriend, male/female friends, male friends, student/teachers and usually take the form of verbal fights, physical fights, bullying and harassment. Based on the type of incident, as in the case of fights, mediation might be a recommendation after a suspension to ensure a peaceful reentry to school of the conflicting parties. Mediation is, in this case, used to support traditional consequences.

Peer mediation assists the disciplinary policy of the school. However, it differs in its approach to resolving conflicts. Peer mediation programs usually aim to improve relationship patterns so that differences and conflicts are dealt with in ways that nurture mutual development. The programs provide strategies to teach students how to cope and handle conflicts before an act of violence occurs (Cutrona & Guerin, 1994; Gill & Frierson, 1995; Hale et al, 1994; Hill, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Morse & Andrea, 1994; Rogers, 1994; Rowicki & Martin, 1994). In addition, if the program is planned properly, facilitated effectively and evaluated appropriately, peer mediation can contribute to the realization of safe learning environment (Guy, 1998). The needs, values, perceptions, goals, feelings and interests of the conflicting parties are revealed during the mediation as opposed to an administrator telling the conflicting parties what must be done to stop the conflict. However, a certain mix of students is best suited for this process to work in the interest of all students and the school community (Cordasco, 1996; Dejong, 1992).

How are referrals made and by whom?
**Methods of Referral**

Referrals to peer mediation are made in a number of ways. In the Toronto Board of Education, "peer mediation relies on vice principals for referrals" (Brown, 1995, p. 37). These referrals called "official" conflicts, are usually due to serious incidents witnessed by teachers, administrators or other staff. This method does not include referrals from students although they are the ones most involved in conflicts and are most knowledgeable about the unrest within a school community. Moreover, as explained by Brown (1995, p. 37), "official" conflict is only a proportion of the full range of conflict in a school and many school conflicts occur out of the range of school staff. On the other hand, in Kolan's (1999, p. 23) study, 80% of the conflicts were referred by administration and security, and 15% by self-referral. The Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution goes one step further. The program coordinators who are responsible for the ongoing organization and operation of the peer mediation program receive requests for mediation and they schedule mediators and the mediations (Crawford & Bodine, 1996, p. 29). Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997, p. 248) recommend that mediation be requested by students, teachers, counsellors, social workers, vice principals, principals or others. Some schools use a peer mediation request form to refer students to mediation (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997, p. 248). Once the referral gets to mediation, "talk" begins.

**MEDIATION (stage 3)**

This section explains what happens during the mediation process. It provides
an overview of the mediation process and explains the problems that peer mediators encounter.

Very little research is available to inform educators and others of what happens during the peer mediation process in secondary schools. Researchers in the field of conflict resolution and peer mediation seem to be more concerned with the impact of the programs than they are about the peer mediation process itself. Only two studies have been conducted on the peer mediation process. Pastorino (1990) investigated the dominant use of logical-positivism in mediation research and proposes the use of post-postivism thought and methods as theoretical foundations for understanding and constructing mediation theory (from the abstract). Unfortunately, this approach to the mediation process is not of direct relevance to the peer mediation process in secondary school because Pastorino is researching the theory of mediation from the psychological and philosophical perspectives. In addition, his participants were disputants; “A design team, composed of adolescents who had mediation process experience as parties in conflict (disputants) was formed for collaborative experience and theory building” (Abstract). On the other hand, my study is investigating the practice and impact of the peer mediation process in secondary schools. My main focus is to hear the “voices” of the peer mediators not the disputants. Also, my research is not exploring the theory of the mediation process.

Kolan (1999) investigated the short-term (five to seven days) impact and success of peer mediation on high school disputants in an ethnically diverse suburban school system. To accomplish this task Kolan asked specific questions
about the agreement: the number of signed agreements; the number in effect after five to seven days; disputants who thought mediation was helpful; the number after mediation; the number of disputants who thought their agreements were fair; the number of disputants who would use mediation in the future; and whether or not the disputants could describe the dispute or the agreement five or seven days after the mediation (p. 103). She asked the disputants if they could describe what happened during the peer mediation process that brought them to successfully sign an agreement (see appendix H). According to Kolan (1999), several questions were asked that addressed the disputants’ perception about the mediation process. Examples were, how was the process being helpful to them or to the other disputants; if the process was fair to them or the other disputants, who referred them to mediation; and their perception of the mediators during the process.

The main finding was that peer mediation is an excellent strategy to teach all high school students how to handle conflict, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, grade, age, grade point average, attendance, or whether or not they are in special education (Kolan, 1999 p. 106). Kolan also found that: eighty-nine percent of the disputants remembered the dispute and agreement five to seven days after the mediation; the disputants found the peer mediation process helpful; they thought their agreements were fair and they would use peer mediation again in the future. However, Kolan (1999) found that African-American and Caucasians responded at a much higher rate to willingly use the process in the future than the Asians, Hispanics or category described as “other.” Another finding was that eighty-two percent of the agreements were still in effect five to seven days after mediation.
However, the process had some short-term impacts. Eighty percent of the mediations involved either verbal disagreements or rumours, and the remaining twenty percent involved fights or property. Kolan believes that the high success rate involving verbal disagreements and rumours makes sense when compared to the responses of the disputants as to what part of the mediation process brought success for them (see appendix H). She reports that fifty-six of the disputants answered that it had to do with being able to talk and express their feelings to the other disputants. She concluded that the mediation process successfully resolves poor communication. Nineteen disputants attributed their success to going through the mediation process. Six disputants felt that the mediators played some role in the success of their mediation and twenty-one disputants did not respond. Two other findings were significant. The first is that there was an over-representation of students receiving special education services and an under-representation of students receiving ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) services. The second is that seventy-three percent of the disputants responded that they felt mediation was helpful to them and eighty-eight percent felt that their agreements were fair at the time of mediation. Kolan (1999) says that there is a statistically significant relationship between the age of the disputants and whether or not they felt the agreement was fair at the time of the mediation. Again, African-American and Caucasian students responded much more favourably about their feelings of their agreement than Asians, Hispanics or category described as “other.” Disputants younger than sixteen years of age felt that their agreement was much more fair than did those disputants sixteen years or older.
Kolan's (1999) study is school-based. On the other hand, Christopher Moore’s (1996) book on the “Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict” is an excellent resource for business practitioners in the field. Although Moore’s process of mediation has similar features to the peer mediation process used in secondary schools, it could not be applied in schools as he describes it. For example, there are twelve stages of mediator moves (steps to mediation) which correspond to the usual six stages in a school-based mediation program. Students cannot devote that much time during the school day away from classes and they are not likely to be available after or before classes for such a lengthy process. Nevertheless, a lot can be learned from Moore’s mediation process and from the program guide of Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine (1997) which explains the peer mediation process in schools.

Peer mediators have the task of making the disputants (students in conflict), feel comfortable and willing to trust them. The peer mediators prepare the physical arrangements to reflect equality of equipment and positioning so that no party is at an auditory, visual, physical or psychological disadvantage (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (p. 42) say that proper preparation demonstrates a sense of control and provides a secure climate which is conducive for the parties to work toward an agreement. The ideal arrangement, according to Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine (1997), is for the disputants to sit facing each other.

The mediators, on the other hand, have to be prepared to problem-solve. Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine (1997) say that the mediators are required to facilitate a specific process but simultaneously must adapt that process often in multiple
ways, to enable the disputants to continue to cooperate to solve the problem (p.48). The mediators have to pay close attention to maintain the conflict resolution process and constantly evaluate the proceedings, make judgments about the most facilitative course of action, act in a decisive manner as well as self-monitor for allegiance to the process (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997, p. 49). Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine recommend six steps in the mediation process. Step one: agreeing to mediate; step two: gathering points of view; step three: focus on interests; step four: create win-win options; step five: evaluate options and step six: create an agreement.

Step one sets the tone for the session and establishes the authority of the mediators. The session begins with the mediators introducing themselves and welcoming the disputants to mediation. The mediators define mediation and also explain to the disputants that their role as mediators is to help them reach their own solution to the problem. The process begins with the ground rules. During the mediation the mediators remain neutral; they do not take sides; the mediation is private; the disputants take turns talking and listening; and it is their cooperation that helps to solve the problem (Schumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997).

Step two entails the gathering of points of view. "The purpose of this step is to ascertain each disputant’s point of view about the incident or situation and to allow the disputants to hear each other’s points of view" (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997, p. 51). During this stage the disputants tell the mediators their points of view about the conflict. The mediators summarize the points of views and verify with the disputants that their perception of the information is accurate. Additional
information and comments about the conflict is encouraged from each disputant. The mediators summarize each statement until all the issues are discussed and verified. The clarification of the major issues and the perceptions of both disputants are vital to reaching an agreement. The mediators usually seek clarification by asking questions such as, “What did you think when that happened?” Explain more about that.” and “What else happened?” (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997).

Step three focuses on the interests. This is very important because the disputants identify their underlying interests: what they want and why. Common interests are discovered or compatible interests are recognized. The mediators help the disputants create a resolution based on their common interests. From this base of understanding and cooperation, the disputants can seek fair ways to resolve their conflicting interests (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). The mediators help the disputants discover their common interests, summarize the interests of both disputants and clarify the information. The mediators make common interests explicit and formulate them as mutual goals (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). Using statements like “both of you seem to agree that...” help the mediators to recognize their commonalities and make it possible for the mediators to create step four: win-win options.

Step four sets the stage for the disputants to cooperatively problem-solve. The disputants are encouraged to brainstorm and produce as many ideas or options that may help solve the conflict. The mediators explain the purpose of brainstorming and suggest certain rules: say any ideas that come to mind; do not judge or discuss the ideas, come up with as many ideas as possible and try to think of unusual ideas
(Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). The disputants are asked to identify ideas that are of common interest. The mediators record these common ideas and help the disputants to identify what ideas will work for them.

Step five involves evaluation of the options. The mediators have the disputants select the options that they can both agree to follow. Consideration is given to each choice in terms of whether or not it is fair to each disputant - will it work?, is it doable?, the consequences of the choice and whether or not it addresses the interests of both disputants. This leads to the agreement.

Step six is the agreement. The mediators ask the disputants to make a plan of action that they can agree to follow. The mediators examine the actions to ensure that the decisions are balanced, specific, realistic, lasting and fair (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). To help clarify the decisions the mediators summarize by asking the specific plan in terms of who, what, when, where and how. Once these are affirmed by both disputants and they agree that the problem is solved, the disputants can make an agreement. The commitment to accept the agreement may be in the form of a handshake between the disputants, a written report or both. Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine (1997) recommend a written agreement in secondary schools.

The mediator concludes the mediation after the disputants and the mediators sign the agreement. Then the mediators may shake the hands of the disputants, thank them for bringing their dispute to mediation and congratulate them for working to reach an agreement. They also invite the disputants to return to mediation if problems develop in implementing the agreement or if other conflicts arise between
themselves or with others. The mediators may also invite the disputants to shake hands (Scrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). However, disputants do not always communicate effectively. To help the process in times of lack of communication or misunderstandings, the mediators may call a separate meeting (s). This meeting is called a caucus. It may be used any time during the process and may be called once or several times. The information shared during the caucus is kept private unless the disputant(s) wishes to disclose the information. A caucus is used for the following reasons:

- To gain agreement to mediate when the disputants seem reluctant to do so;
- To allow for face-saving by disputants and to address different levels of understanding of the purpose of mediation;
- To uncover information or clarify details that disputants may be unwilling to reveal only in private;
- To move beyond an impasse;
- To deal with issues of diversity or reduce tensions between disputants;
- To explore options, especially consequences, that might not be obvious;
- To help disputants understand the benefits of cooperating to reach an agreement;
- To allow disputants time alone to think and reflect;
- To allow disputants time to cool off;
- To build trust in the peer mediator and/or the mediation process (Scrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997, p. 54)

**Problems with the Peer Mediation Process**

The peer mediation process is not without its problems, however. Some mediations do not end in an agreement for a variety of reasons. The disputants may use mediation to get out of class; they may lack the social skills to communicate appropriately during mediation; conflict involving groups may be too challenging for
mediation; disputants may fail to cooperate; ground rules may be violated; and tempers or emotions may get out of control (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). However, the mediators are trained to recognize some of these problems before they get out of hand and usually an adult advisor is close by during a mediation to assist the mediators if problems arise. In addition, the mediators know that they can terminate the mediation at any time and report to the adult supervisor that the mediation has not resulted in a resolution of the conflict (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997).

**POST-MEDIATION: OUTCOMES/ EFFECTS (Stage 4)**

Researchers report that there are a number of benefits to implementing peer mediation programs in secondary schools. Some claim that the programs can significantly improve a school climate (Jones, 1998; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Davenport, 1997). Jones reports that the programs can also have a significant and sustained impact on teachers’ and staff perceptions of a school climate for both cadre and whole school programs at all education levels. This section presents two perspectives of the peer mediation program. The first is the perception that peer mediation is beneficial to peer mediators, disputants, teachers, administrators, the school climate and the larger community. The other perception represents a negative view and suggestions of the limitations or concerns about peer mediation.

The literature suggests that peer mediation has many positive effects and these effects are manifested in a number of ways. As an alternative strategy for resolving disputes in schools (Sweeney, 1995), it provides a structured forum for the
resolution of interpersonal conflicts (Engert, 1996); positively changes students' interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict behaviour (Baker-Jackson, 1998); works for students of all ethnic backgrounds (Kolan, 1999); contributes to the creation of a climate of nonviolence by students and adults (Patti, 1996; Baker-Jackson, 1998); improves mediators' performance (White, 1996); makes a positive difference in the attitudes and behaviour of students and increases students' ability to engage in conflict resolution effectively (Vermillion, 1989); increases the peer mediators' knowledge of conflict resolution and mediation (Nance, 1995); increases empowerment (Araki, Takeshita & Kafomoto, 1989; Bush & Folger, 1994); teaches peace education (Johnson & Johnson, 1995); increases volunteerism (Araki, Takeshita, & Kafomoto, 1989); improves conflict resolution in the home (Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Winston, 1996); improves self-esteem for mediators and disputants, increases the acquisition of problem-solving skills, improves self-discipline at home and reduces violence (Terros, 1988); prepares the students for pluralism (Bickmore, 1997); trains mediators how to manage anger (Luhn, 1992; Jackson, A 1993); builds collaborative communities (Potapchuk & Polk, 1994; Kolan, 1999); helps to prevent youth violence in schools (Powell & Hawkins, 1996) because it teaches students how to cope and handle conflicts before an act of violence occurs (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Cutrona & Guerin, 1994; Khattri, 1991; Prothro-Stith, 1995); teaches students how to practice and model tolerance that may prevent and settle conflicts peacefully (Cutrona & Guerin, 1994); teaches students a life skill that empowers students to solve their own problems (Hill, 1996; Scherer, 1992; Smith, 1993); and teaches that conflict is a normal part of life that
provides an opportunity to learn and grow (Glass, 1994). Schools are one of the few places where children of all cultures converge and peer mediation helps to promote mutual understandings of the various cultures (Glass, 1994). Peer mediation also teaches democratic principles and offers a voice for those who feel alienated or under-represented (Kolan, 1999, p. 36). Further, mediation redefines conflict in such a way that no one has to lose, provides a commitment to cooperation, and creates new possibilities that are beneficial to all involved (Kolan, 1999, p.35).

Peer mediation programs are very effective at handling disputes. Jones (1998) found that, at all levels, there is a very high rate of agreement between disputants after mediation has taken place and there is also a high mediator and disputant satisfaction. Toronto Board of Education research also emphasized the positive effects of peer mediation. The educators found out through questionnaires (year 1) and interviews (year 2) that students trained in conflict resolution workshops felt that they had gained substantial benefits (Brown, 1995). They described the programs as interesting and useful to resolve school-based disputes. Students trained in peer mediation, even if they had performed few or no mediation, indicated that the program influenced their personal lives (Brown, 1995, p. 29). One such student explains:

It hasn't affected me, but it makes me more aware of what I'm doing. Like now I'm negotiating, now I'm brainstorming. I used to get very carried away when I had a fight or an argument... but ever since this mediation training I'm more calm. Especially in my house with my dad. Now I don't go ahead on... I express myself but I do it calmly, I don't let my stress level go up. It has affected me in a positive away. I think all parents should get a course in mediation. When you get that birth certificate signed, you also get that mediation. All the steps are in my head. I use them with my mother, and when I'm with my friends. Eventually, it just becomes second nature.

(Brown, 1995, p. 29).
Researchers also report that peer mediation programs provide significant benefits in developing constructive social and conflict behaviour in children at all educational levels (Jones, 1997). Exposure to peer mediation reduces personal conflicts and increases the tendency to help others with conflicts, increases pro-social values, decreases aggressiveness, and increases perception-taking and conflict competence (Jones, 1997). Students learn safe and effective ways to deal with conflicts, tensions, hostility, and frustrations are reduced among students; listening, critical thinking, and problem solving skills are enhanced; being able to manage conflicts builds self-esteem; teachers are able to emphasize more positive skills and values such as communication; problem-solving, courtesy, tolerance, cooperation, responsibility and making and keeping agreements (Wilson, 1998); also more class time is spent on teaching and less on discipline. Mediation in schools promotes two of the most respected principles of education: experiential learning and correct modelling (Folger & Taylor, 1984, p. 203). A closer look at the peer mediation process reveals its additional effects on the peer mediators, disputants, non-disputing students, teachers and administrators.

**Benefits to Peer Mediators**

Peer mediation provides students with a tool to solve their own problems. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their behaviour and for their solution. Experience tells that teaching conflict resolution to students is as important to preparing tomorrow's workforce as their reading, writing and math classes. Researchers say that conflict resolution helps students develop fundamental competencies (self control, self respect, empathy, teamwork) needed to make a
successful transition into adulthood (National Institute for Dispute Resolution, 1997). Some say that the community benefits from mediation because it does “catch on” (Crary, 1992). In addition, it improves students’ ability to resolve conflicts (Rogers, 1994; Davis, 1994; Kinasewitz, 1996), develops their creativity and cooperation (Thousand, et al, 1994); teaches them citizenship responsibilities, provides ethical instruction, empowers, offers hope, assists in communicating effectively, resolves disputes positively as well as having a tremendous impact on the lives of students in and outside of school (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994; Cutrona and Guerin, 1994; Nor, 1996; Powell et al, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Field, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Rogers, 1994; Davis, 1994, Bodine, 1994; Kirleis, 1995; George et al, 1995; Thousand et al, 1994, Benard, 1990; O'Connor et al, 1995; Pettit, 1995; Aitken, 1995; McMahon, 1995; Jones & Carlin, 1994; Singh, 1995; Lane and McWhirter, 1992; Terros, 1988).

**Benefits to Disputants**

Research on the Short-term Impact of Peer Mediation on High School Disputants (see Appendix H) illustrates the value of the peer mediation process to disputants (Kolan, 1999) and supports the perception that talk works (Kolb et al, 1994). In addition, Kolan’s findings show that mediation helps disputants to increase their trust, respect, confidence, and their understanding toward the mediators. It also confirms, to the disputants, that they are listened to during the mediation process. Kolan (1999, p. 96) found that the disputants appear to be very pleased with the way the mediators handled the mediation process. Most disputants who participated in her study say that they would use mediation again. These findings
explain how disputants perceive the benefits of peer mediation.

**Benefits to Teachers**

When students behave appropriately in their classes, it makes teaching easier, and more pleasurable. It creates a peaceful environment that is conducive to learning. Research findings report that the conflict resolution effects on behaviour are very positive (Conflict Resolution Education Network, 1999). Additional findings suggest that students are empowered to solve their own problems and that there is improved academic performance (Johnson & Johnson, 1994); less disruptive behaviour (Sherrod, 1995; Powell et al, 1995; Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management, 1996) and less physical violence (New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution, 1994; Meek, 1992). Students who use their leadership talents to act out negative behaviour and promote such behaviours to fellow students, have visibly improved due to their participation in mediation training (New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution, 1994). The improvement in classroom management and the decrease in the time teachers spend dealing with student conflicts and fights can improve the quality of education delivered to students because teachers can spend more time teaching and less time disciplining students. Jones et al (1998) say:

> The data clearly demonstrates that exposure to peer mediation reduces personal conflict and increases the tendency to help others with conflicts, increases pro-social values, decreases aggressiveness, and increases perspective taking and conflict competence. Especially for peer mediators, these impacts are significant, cumulative, and are sustained for long periods. Students trained in mediation, at all educational levels, are able to enact and utilize the behavioural skills taught in training. (P.5).

Since peers can influence their peers more directly and effectively than adults
(Crawford & Bodine, 1996), empowering mediators will ultimately benefit the administrators.

**Benefits to Administrators**

Data from schools indicate that student mediators solve many disputes, the mediation agreement usually remains intact, and suspensions drop dramatically because of the peer mediation programs. One principal says that the major benefits of her school’s mediation program were that: (a) small problems did not have a chance to become larger ones; (b) discipline problems declined; (c) problem-solving skills were taught; (d) students gained recognition; and (e) school personnel benefited from fewer interruptions (Roderick, 1989). The literature in the field suggests that peer mediation programs reduce administrators’ and teachers’ time in working with conflicts (Johnson & Johnson, 1995); reduce the level of violence and crime in the school (Horowitz & Broadman, 1995; Rowicki & Martin, 1994; Roher, 1997); and enhance the self-esteem (Terros, 1988), performance (White, 1996), and attendance of the students trained as mediators. In a 1995 statewide survey of high schools in California, more than 70% of the respondents indicated that student peer mediation programs reduce suspensions. A majority of respondents also believe that the programs reduce violence (Sherrod, 1995) and a study of more than 700 students participating in an Orange County, North Carolina middle school’s conflict resolution program documented an 82 per cent reduction in referrals to the principal’s office, a 42 percent decline in in-school suspensions, and a 97 percent reduction in out-of-school suspensions (Powell et al, 1995). These results illustrate the difference that peer mediation can make for
school administrators and the school community.

**Benefits to School Climate**

Research supports the effectiveness of peer mediation in schools (Jones, 1998; Anticot, 1997; Pruitt & Kressel, 1989; Baker-Jackson, 1998; Frederikson, 1998; Denmark, 1995). Studies on students' conflict, attitudes and behaviours, school climate, and the use of mediation as a dispute resolution process reveal that peer mediation programs provide significant benefits in developing constructive social and conflict behaviour in students at all educational levels (Jones, 1998). Exposure to peer mediation programs have a significant and lasting impact on students' conflict attitudes and behaviours (New Mexico Centre for Dispute Resolution, 1994; Jones, 1997). As a result, there are noticeable differences in the reduction of violent incidents in most schools. Teachers experience a more positive classroom climate and a reduction in energy spent on resolving conflicts among students. Principals also report a decrease in conflicts reported to them (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). Some schools also experience a reduction in personal conflicts such as assaults, disruptive behaviours, fighting (New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution, 1994; Jones, 1998) and physical harassment (Koch, 1988). In some secondary schools, peer mediation programs have reduced the drop out rate (Milhauser, 1989). Other reports include a reduction in suspension rates (McDonald & Mariarty, 1990), a 46% to 70% reduction in suspension for fights (Clheathan, 1989), a 75% reduction in the number of incidents reported to the principal (Johnson & Johnson, 1996) and more than 200 disputes per year resolved with 96% to 100% success rate (Schumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1991). Teachers and
administrators also report that a peer mediation program had a great impact in reducing violence (Greenwald & Johnson, 1987) and a reduction in student assaults (Meek, 1992). The students' successes in resolving their conflicts reduces the number of conflicts referred to administrators, which in turn reduces suspensions (Kolan, 1999, p.6) and ultimately improves school climates and communities.

The program report from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (US Department of Education, October 1996) and The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (US Department of Justice) claim that peer mediation programs are among the most widely chosen types of conflict resolution programs in US schools. They also claim that young people can become effective mediators because they understand their peers, make the process age-appropriate, empower their peers, command their respect, and normalize the conflict resolution process. They also believe that young people can connect with their peers in ways that adults cannot. The report stresses that peer mediators can frame disputes in the perspective, language, and attitudes of youth. Young people perceive peer mediation as a way to talk out problems without the fear of an adult judging their behaviour, thoughts, or feelings. They say that peer mediators are respected because they uphold the problem-solving process and honour the disputants in the way they conduct the mediation sessions. They report that the self-empowering process appeals to youth and foster self-esteem and self-discipline. When young people solve their own problems, they feel they are in control and can make a commitment to the solutions they have created.
**Impact on Communities**

Schools can learn from community mediation. Moore (1986) believes that no conflict resolution process guarantees specific outcomes, but that there are several benefits to mediation. He claims that community mediation usually facilitates rapid settlements, addresses power imbalances, participants are usually satisfied with the process and the results and there is a high rate of compliance when a mediator is used. Bush and Folger (1994) support the power of mediation within communities. They believe that mediation responds to conflict through empowerment, recognition and the transformation of lives. Others promote mediation as a sound and proven method for resolving conflicts, and as an alternative to the judicial approach (Mastellone, 1993). Mastellone says that through education, individuals can be empowered with communication skills and the knowledge of mediation techniques, and attain a greater degree of self awareness so that unnecessary conflicts can be prevented, or at least ameliorated. When people, she says, are empowered with these skills, they will be better equipped to deal with conflicts as they arise and less likely to get fixed in their positions.

Restorative justice is also making an impact in communities and in schools as an important method to create peaceful schools. This process is not new to Canadians. Zehr (1990), a writer and a consultant on criminal justice issues, sees mediation facilitating restorative justice. To him, crime involves conflict, and restorative justice involves victims' genuine accountability for their crimes. That includes an opportunity to understand the human consequences of one's acts, to face up to what one has done and to whom one has done it. Real accountability, he
says, means more. It involves taking responsibility for the results of one's behaviour. Offenders, he advocates, must be allowed and encouraged to help decide what will happen to make things right, then to take steps to repair the damage. Zehr (1990) cites the Victim-Offender Reconciliation movement (VORP) which originated in Canada and developed in the United States through a project in 1977-78 in Elkhart. An educational doctoral practicum done by Theodore Kinasewitz (1996) in Nova Southeastern University also credits mediation for reducing aggression and violent behaviour and studies like that of David Trevaskis (1994) credits mediation for promoting the safe-school planning. He claims that costly measures from purchasing metal detectors to hiring full-time police officers do not attack the causes of conflict. He believes that the best way to handle violence in schools and prevent its spread throughout the community is to defuse disputes before they become violent. While some believe that mediation can solve personal problems, accomplish tasks, develop social competencies, and address collective issues through an ongoing exchange of resources with members of their personal community (Cobb, 1979; Gottlieb & Todd, 1979 p. 183), others provide evidence that questions the value of mediation.

**PEER MEDIATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Limited research on peer mediation in secondary schools makes it impossible to get a rough survey of the topic and to find out what had already been done and what remains to be done at the secondary level. It is therefore not possible to verify existing theories or know if this study is developing new ones without exposure to different lines of research. Furthermore, the unpublished
studies that exist were conducted at the elementary level (Kmita, 1997, p.42). Peer mediation at the elementary levels is different from peer mediation at the secondary level in Canadian schools. The issues at the secondary level are usually different and more challenging than many issues at the elementary level. Drugs, assaults, gangs, and violence are more frequent and dangerous in the secondary schools and some of these issues are often criminal in nature. Therefore, elementary studies do not provide much help in identifying the important issues that have to be researched, resolved, or verified at the secondary level; nor do they provide a source of information regarding the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the peer mediation in secondary schools.

**Conclusion**

This chapter reviews the literature in the field of conflict resolution and peer mediation. It identifies what research has been done and what needs to be done in the this field. It discusses the positive impact that peer mediation programs has on peer mediators, students in conflict (disputants), the school climate, teachers, administrators, parents and the community outside of school as well as the contradictory debate about the value of mediation. The literature review reveals a lack of research on peer mediation and peer mediation training in secondary schools.

However, research is beginning to surface on peer mediation in secondary schools. First is Kolan’s (1999) investigation of the short-term impact of peer mediation on high school disputants in an ethnically diverse suburban school system. Her findings are limited to a particular school. On the other hand, my
research investigates the peer mediation process in eight different secondary schools with the participation of students from all racial groups. Nevertheless, both studies complement each other; Kolan’s focus is on the disputants and this study focuses on the mediators. The mediation process is conducted by disputants and mediators, so together Kolan and I have completed the first investigation of the peer mediation process in secondary schools. Her findings are of great relevance and support to this study and vice versa.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methodology and the procedures that are used in this study. It justifies the choice and the appropriateness of using the qualitative method of research. Details of the procedures employed in the data collection and analysis, descriptions of the schools/communities and the interviews are also included.

*The Nature of the Qualitative Design*

I employed qualitative methods in this study to explore peer mediation. The qualitative study of people is a "process of learning what is happening. It is the observer's task to find out what is fundamental or central to the people or world under observation" (Lofland, quote in Patton, 1980, p. 36-37). The data are obtained from interviews, observations and documents (Merriam, 1988). The qualitative approach seeks to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992) as well as to understand and interpret the perspectives of others by permitting participants to present information in their own ways, in their own words, thereby allowing the data to speak for themselves. In addition, this method strives to understand how all parts of the process work together to form a whole (Merriam, 1988).

The nature of qualitative research makes it a perfect fit for certain types of studies. Qualitative research offers flexibility. It does not predict what may happen but instead tries to find out the nature of the setting, what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their
meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting and in the analysis communicate that to others who are interested in that setting (Patton, 1985, in Merriam, 1988 p. 17). Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities: the world is not seen as an objective thing but instead as a function of personal interaction and perceptions (Merriam, 1988), a place in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing (Glesne and Peshlin, 1992). To understand and interpret the various perspectives of participants, the researcher must gain access to the multiple perspectives. Certain qualities of a researcher may be best suited for this type of research. Merriam (1988) believes that the world needs to be interpreted, not measured, and so she identifies four features of qualitative researchers.

The first is that qualitative researchers are primarily concerned with the process rather than the outcomes or products. The second is that qualitative researchers are interested in meaning: how people make sense of their lives; what they experience; how they interpret these experiences; and how they structure their social worlds. The third is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data is mediated through the human instrument, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or machine. This allows the researcher to adapt techniques to the circumstances; the total context can be considered and what is known about the situation can be expanded through sensitivity to nonverbal aspects; the human instrument can process data immediately, can clarify and summarize as the study evolves, and can explore anomalous responses (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As the researcher becomes the
main research instrument, he or she observes, asks questions, and interacts with research participants (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The fourth is that qualitative research involves fieldwork. Merriam (1988) says that one must physically go to the people, setting, site, institution ("the field"), in order to observe behaviour in its natural setting. She says that this type of research builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than testing existing theory with the hope of finding a theory that explains the data.

Qualitative research allows the researcher to interpret the data. According to Leedy (1993, p. 141), this interpretive character means that qualitative inquirers aim beneath manifest behaviour to the meaning events have for those who experience them. Therefore, this method is best to investigate the real meaning of peer mediation and the occurrences or behaviours before, during and after the mediation process.

**Justification for choosing the Qualitative Design**

The qualitative method of research was chosen because of the many characteristics and advantages that it offers to this study. Qualitative research provides insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing (Merriam, 1988, p. 10) and these features are what this study seeks. The approach will also uncover the interaction of significant factors that are characteristic of the peer mediation process, provide descriptions and explanations of the process and will help the researcher to "arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study." (Merriam, 1988, p. 11). In addition, the qualitative method has four essential characteristics (Merriam, 1988, p. 11) that are of importance to this study.
First, the qualitative method is particularistic. It focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. It is descriptive. This means that the end product is a rich, “thick” (complete) description of the phenomenon under the study. The fact that the qualitative method will interpret the meaning of demographic and descriptive data in terms of cultural norms and mores, community values, deep-seated attitudes and notions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 119) makes the method a good match for this study. The unique strength of the qualitative study is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidences - documents, artifacts, interviews and observation (Merriam, 1988, p. 8). This adds to the usefulness of this method to this study.

Qualitative method is heuristic which means that studies using this method “illuminate the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 1988, p. 13). The fact that this can, according to Merriam, bring about the discovery of a new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known makes the qualitative method appealing here. Also, as stated by Stake (Merriam, 1988). Qualitative research can uncover “Previously unknown relationships to a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied. Insights into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result from case studies” p. 13.

Studies of a qualitative nature also have the feature of being inductive; this study relies on inductive reasoning. “Generalizations, concepts, or hypotheses emerge from an examination of data - data grounded in the context itself” (Merriam, 1988, p. 13). The justification to use the qualitative method is therefore based on the characteristics of the method and its ability to “remedy or improve practice”
(Helmstadter, 1970 in Merriam, 1988). In addition, the nature of the data and the problem for research dictate the research methodology (Leedy, 1993). In this case, the qualitative method is more useful than the quantitative method to interpret the personal stories of this study and to make the connections between the stories. Like Glesne & Peshkin (1992), I am also attracted to the qualitative method because it matches my personal view of seeing and understanding the world.

The method is a “warm” approach to the central problem of research (Leedy, 1993) and that feature is essential when people are sharing their personal stories. People will only be open about their true thoughts, feelings, beliefs, understandings and desires within the confines of a warm environment. Furthermore, qualitative research involves fieldwork and because it is concerned with human beings, interpersonal relationships, personal values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, and feelings (Leah, 1989 in Leedy, 1993), it is the right choice for this study.

The other choice would have been the quantitative approach, but it is, in my opinion, a “cold” approach; its decisions are cold and it is too impersonal for this type of study. The quantitative research method manipulates variables and attempts to control natural phenomena, constructs hypotheses and “tests” them against the hard facts or reality (Leedy, 1993). The researcher controls too much in this method. For example, the researcher decides what factors or variables might cause certain results (cause and effects) and carries out tests to either support or reject the null hypothesis at some level of statistical probability (Ramer, 1989, p 7). This control would not reflect the emotions of the participants of this study and it would not help in finding out what happens in the mediation process. This study needs to hear
directly from the participants. It wants to give a “voice” (Leedy, 1993) to the students in particular, and therefore, face-to-face contact is important to this study in order to capture emotions, to conduct a dialogue and to clarify issues. Also, the researcher is more likely to hear the truth from a personal interview and so the study becomes believable because of its coherence, insight, and instrumental utility (Leedy, 1993). Furthermore, some people might fear putting on paper what they really think and fear that they may be treated as a statistic, a number, since the focus of the quantitative method is on understanding facts. The qualitative method, on the other hand, “focuses on the perspectives of the insider, talking to and/or observing subjects who have experienced firsthand the activities or procedures under scrutiny. The qualitative researcher believes that firsthand experience provides the most meaningful data” (Leedy, 1993, p. 144). The quantitative method does not cater to such responses because observation is not a feature of that research method. There is value in the observation. It makes it possible to contextualize the participants’ comments and how they understand and make meaning of their experiences.

I have selected the qualitative method of inquiry because I am interested in the understandings, feelings, and thinking of the participants. I believe that the interaction, dialogue and interviews associated with the qualitative method will provide the data needed to best learn about the peer mediation process in schools. In addition, hearing directly from the participants, especially the peer mediators, will provide educators with better insight about the peer mediation process because the
direct voice is more convincing, more believable and it can better capture the emotions through personal interviews.

Initially I had intended to use both qualitative and quantitative methods as recommended at my proposal hearing, but due to the political climate in schools at the time of the interviews, it was not possible to conduct a quantitative study. Furthermore, schools in the study were not offering any extra-curricular activities. In addition, the school Boards that I approached refused my request to conduct the study in their board. It was then that I decided to only use the 18 year olds in neighbouring boards. All coordinators of the eight schools were willing to participate which provided me access to 18 year olds who are still attending school.

**Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study. The purpose of the pilot study was to assist in the development of questions. Students who have been peer mediators for more than five years, and their coordinators were consulted about the semi-structured interview questions which were developed for students. The aim of the consultation was to edit and revise the questions once the peer mediators had given their input. The students provided input regarding how their peers might relate, understand and interpret the interview questions as written. Twelve peer mediators and one coordinator from School E participated in the discussion. The questions were revised after the meeting.

**Interviews**

The first step was to contact all secondary schools in my neighbourhood to
determine which had a peer mediation program (see Table 4). I found out that more than half of the schools do not have a peer mediation program. My second step was to establish certain criteria for selecting participants for the study and I applied them in my selection of students from the eight schools chosen. The schools from which the students were selected needed to have had a peer mediation program in their school for at least one year or more. The reason for this requirement is based on my belief that the peer mediation program had to be established over a period of time in order for the students to respond in a meaningful way to the interview questions. I also requested interviews from administrators and teachers who were involved as peer mediator advisors as well as administrators and teachers who were not connected to the program. This was done so that the perceptions would be balanced, validated and would provide conclusions which might have been less influenced by bias or loyalty to the peer mediation program in their school.

Interviews from the peer mediators were of particular importance because they understand the peer mediation process and can usually better explain it. Moreover, peer mediators can offer an insider's perception of the process because they have experienced firsthand the activities or procedures under scrutiny. Unfortunately, only students who were 18 years old participated in this study. This happened because there was political unrest between the Ontario Government and their teachers at the time of the interviews. As a result, most teachers in the province participated in strikes and the unrest, (1997 to present), negatively affected
extra-curricular programs like peer mediation. Teacher Advisors and co-ordinators of the peer mediation programs in my study refused to continue their voluntary work with the peer mediation program after school hours and without their help in identifying possible candidates for the interviewing process, permission from parents of students under 18 years of age could not be obtained. Fortunately, students who were 18 years old did not need parental permission. I needed also to hear from a cross section of the 18 year-old students to reflect differences in gender, race, academic abilities and performance in order to reflect the school communities. Disputants (students involved in a conflict), some who refused mediation and those who were never involved in a conflict were interviewed because their perception of the impact of the peer mediation program in their school could provide additional, different and/or validate the perceptions of others.

Except for the students who implied that they were associated with gangs, all participants in the study had flexible, pre-structured questions to answer. Different questions were created for each category. The interviews of students who had never been to mediation because they had no conflict were less structured. All interviews were conducted over a period of six months. The disputants were the most difficult to interview. Often they cancelled their appointments, rescheduled, then weeks later called to say that they did not have the time to meet for an interview. One mediator retired from school but all the others are currently involved in a peer mediation program in their school. Except for one school, the populations of the schools are multi-cultural.
The staff members chosen for the interviews were known to me because of their involvement with the peer mediation program in their school. They agreed to be interviewed and I worked through them to identify students who were 18 years of age and were peer mediators or disputants. One staff member volunteered her teenager who was a peer mediator at a school and some friends who are teachers recommended students whom they knew were never in a conflict. I wanted to minimize the perception that all students interviewed had to have had a conflict or be a mediator and so the referral from a teacher not involved in the process, I thought, would help to promote that viewpoint. I also met with the students before the interviews were conducted to explain the study and to personally get their approval to participate.

All 33 participants (see Table 4) were individually interviewed for between one hour and two hours (Appendix B & C). They were interviewed outside of the school building either at their home or at my home. The purpose of the interviews was to give the students a “voice” and to hear, directly from them, their perspectives of the peer mediation process.

The interviews focus on the peer mediation process: pre-mediation, referral, mediation and post-mediation. The questions on pre-mediation inquire into the selection and training of peer mediators. Questions about mediation aim to find out the students’ perception of what happens during the mediation process, their experiences and activities during the process. The actions and perceptions of the peer mediators are especially important here. The final category is post-mediation.
These questions explore the outcomes of the peer mediation process, the impact on students (mediators, disputants and other students), and the impact on the school climate. Before the questions were asked about the pre-mediation process, the students were requested to define mediation. Observation notes were made immediately after each interview.

The interviews were taped and reported verbatim. Selected responses are included in the findings. Charts, diagrams and summaries are designed by the researcher to further aid interpretations of the findings.

**Analysis of the Data**

The data collected from the interviews were analysed individually in four stages. Each tape recording was transcribed verbatim, the themes identified and those themes which arose from the interviews were added to the original themes and were then entered into a data base. The original themes are mediation, mediator, referral and organization and the impact of the peer mediation programs. Two additional themes emerged from the data - violence in schools and conflict. The fields of each interview were sorted by a computer data base and recurring categories and themes were identified. The six headings (Table 5) were reorganised under four main themes and headings. These are pre-mediation, referral and organization, the peer mediation process and post-mediation- outcomes.
Table 4
Demographic Chart

<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Size of school</th>
<th>Co-ordinator</th>
<th>Prev Exposure</th>
<th>Years of program</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>1700</td>
<td></td>
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<td>6 refused mediation</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

Column 1 tells the categories of participants. Six students refused mediation but were interviewed. Col. 2 identifies the school. Col. 3 describes the size of the school. Col. 4 identifies the co-ordinator of the program. Col. 5 reports on the previous experiences of the participants with peer mediation. Col. 6 explains the number of years that the program has been in operation. Col. 7 gives the summary of the participants in the study (33).
BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE PARTICIPANTS

Participants interviewed were mediators, students sent to mediation (disputants), students who refused mediation, other students, teachers, administrators, coordinators of the mediation programs and a non-teaching staff member (coordinator of a peer mediation program). There were thirty-three participants in the study. Seven of the participants are administrators, one non-teaching, seven teachers, eight peer mediators and ten other students. Two of the ten students have never been in a conflict, two went to mediation and the remaining six refused mediation but they participated in the interviews. However, some of those who refused mediation have had some exposure and knowledge of the mediation process but they will not trust mediation to resolve their disputes. The students who participated in this study were all 18 years of age and older. A total of 18 males and 15 females were involved in the study. Three disputants refused an interview. Although the survey was not categorized by race, the interviews included students of African, Chinese, Indian, European and West Indian heritage.

The names of the students participating in the study and their schools remain confidential. In addition, I have used pseudonyms. The students were chosen from eight different neighbouring secondary schools. All eight programs are different in the way in which they function in their school. For example, some programs have a high profile while one in particular aimed to keep a very low profile to avoid too much attention to the mediators. Despite some apparent differences in the programs, certain features are similar, for example: (1) all have the support of the administrators; (2) all have at least one volunteer program coordinator; (3) all
mediate only student-student conflicts; (4) all schools mediate mainly in pairs; (5) all students receive the same initial training, conducted by the same training team who used the same method; (6) adults are not usually present during the mediation; (7) all use verbal and written referrals; (8) written agreements are signed; and (9) all programs conduct a follow-up on the agreements. Table 4 provides additional information on each school.

Community and School Description

Participants were drawn from eight different schools, all located in large cities (see table 4). They are all approximately one hour to half an hour from a large metropolitan area and they are also in the same geographical region. School E is approximately one hour from a large metropolitan area. It is in a town of approximately 295,500 population. It opened in September 1976 as an Intermediate school and became a Secondary school in 1988. The school is multicultural in nature, with a large percentage from a variety of backgrounds from Africa, Canada, Italy, Portugal and the West Indies. The building has three floors and forty portables and the school community is suffering from overcrowding. The school serves a population of 2,000 students and it offers traditional academic programs, as well as programs to meet the needs of intellectually challenged students, cooperative education including features like World of Work, enhanced programs in English, mathematics, extended French as well as an off-site program for the students who need an alternative learning style and setting. The school is noted for its achievements in athletics and the arts. Violence occurs frequently and that created the need for the peer mediation program in that school. The administrators
approach peer mediation as a proactive program that has the role to prevent school violence. The program was five years old at the time of the interviews. Five teachers, one guidance counsellor and a vice principal started the program. Forty students were trained as peer mediators.

School B is situated about an hour from a large metropolitan city. The population of the city is 295,500 and the school population is 200 students. Programs are limited at the school at the time of the interviews because of the small size of the population. However, a full range of courses are provided in accordance with the expectations of the Ministry of Education and the School Board. In addition, the school has access to extra programs to meet the needs of the intellectually challenged or individual needs. The school opened in 1995 with grades 9 and grades 10 students only. The students are largely homogeneous and are predominantly of European heritage. The school building is a brick, one floor plan. There are no portables. Despite the size of the school population there are frequent conflicts in the school but they have not been violent. They are usually rumours and gossips. The mediation program has a number of students who were mediators in elementary school and this is an advantage to the school community and to the mediators. There is no recorded history of this program. The only information shared is that the program started with ten students and three teachers and that the advisors and the peer mediators have meetings when there is a need to do so. The peer mediation program is perceived, by the school community, as a good program to implement in a school.

School F is half an hour from the metropolitan city. The population of the city
is 619,600. The school opened in 1993 and by 1995 the school population increased to 813. Currently it is overcrowded with a population of 2,500 students attending the school. The school offers traditional programs but additional help is available to those who need special programs. The school is multicultural. However, there is a predominant presence of students from Europe, the Americas and the West Indies. The building has three floors and thirty portables which is not sufficient for this school community. This school has a lot of violent incidents and so the peer mediation program is implemented as a proactive program to combat violence in the school. Three teachers and one administrator are involved in the peer mediation program. They do not keep record of the mediations or the conflicts and they do not have meetings. However, the trained mediators are called upon to mediate conflicts.

School G is located in a city that has a population of 619,600 and it is only 30 minutes from the Metropolitan city. The school opened in 1986 with a multicultural population. This multicultural school community of 2200 students are of Canadian, British, Chinese, Filipinos, East Indian and West Indian heritage. The school spirit is extremely high and there is a developed sense of responsibility by students and staff of acceptance and appreciation of others. There are a variety of programs which cater for the academic, non-academic and the challenged. An off-site alternative education program is also provided for students who have difficulty learning in a structured environment and there is a highly-developed program for the physically and emotionally challenged. The school has two floors and 30 portables. While space in the school is limited, the school is not over crowded. This is a very
peaceful school where a violent act might occur inside the school once in a year if ever. The students are very happy to attend this school. At the time of the interviews some members of the staff expressed the need for a peer mediation program because the students are very actively involved in negative behaviour in the community. The administrators tell the advisors that there is no need for the program because there is no violence in the school. However, six staff members, including teachers, social workers, other staff and an administrator are planning to implement the program and to conduct weekly meetings. Twenty-nine students are currently identified to be trained as peer mediators in the fall of the next academic year.

School H is situated in a community of 295,500 people and it is approximately one hour from the Metropolitan city. The school opened in 1990. The current population is 1,700 students and the school community is multicultural with a high percentage of students from African, Caribbean and Portuguese backgrounds. The programs are traditional but provisions are made to meet the needs of special needs students. The building has two floors and fifteen portables. There is a lack of space for classroom use but the cafeteria and other areas are spacious. The school community experiences a lot of violence. The peer mediation program was five years old at the time of the interviews but it is highly unstructured, it is not very effective. The violence continues. Fifteen students are trained as peer mediators but they never meet to share and keep their skills current. Yet they are called upon to mediate regularly. The support of the program is cosmetic because the administrator supports the program in principle only. One non-teaching staff is
responsible for the program as an additional task and so it is difficult for the organization and planning to effectively take place. The administrators and most staff perceive the peer mediation program as a proactive measure against violence.

School L is situated about half an hour from the Metropolitan city. It serves a city of 619,600 people and it has a school population of 1700 students with a multicultural background. There is no predominant cultural group. British, Chinese, Europeans, East Indians, and West Indians are all part of the mix. The school started in 1977 as a middle school and in eighteen years developed into a very supportive school community. It offers traditional programs as well as support programs for special needs students. The building has one floor and twenty-five portables and is over crowded. The school has the reputation of fostering academic excellence and serving the learning needs of its diverse population. This is another peaceful school where violent acts are rare. However, as a proactive measure, the administrators are developing a peer mediation program. Six teachers and two administrators were recently trained in the skills of conflict resolution and peer mediation. Although the program has been in existence for more than five years, little is known about peer mediation in the school because the original coordinator was transferred and there is no record of the activities of the mediators or the program. Furthermore, most of the original peer mediators graduated from the school.

School M is located in a city of 619,600 people. It opened in 1970 and currently the school serves 900 students. It is located about thirty minutes away from the Metropolitan city. The building has one floor and two portables. It serves
students from a variety of areas and offers traditional programs with very little support for special needs students. The school is multicultural with students from African, British, European, East Indian and West Indian backgrounds. The school administrators stress the academics and the students are mostly high achievers. This environment provides a model for other schools where students respect themselves, their teachers and others and the school climate is extremely caring, forgiving and nurturing of all students. Most teachers have been at that school for most, if not all, of their teaching career. Space is limited but it is not a great concern of the educators in this school. To date there has not been a reported case of a violent incidence at this school. The peer mediation program developed because some teachers, special service employees and an administrator believed in the program and thought that the peer mediation and conflict resolution skills were good for the students to have. The program has very little support from the staff because the administrators believe that since there is no violence in the school there is no need for the program. But the parents and the parent council support the program. Despite the low support at the school level, fifteen students are trained as peer mediators. They meet weekly.

School N is located in a populated area of 295,500 people. It is half an hour from the metropolitan city and it serves the educational needs of 2,000 students. The school opened in 1985. The community is multicultural with no predominant cultural group. However, there are high percentages of African, East Indians, European, and West Indian students. The school offers a variety of academic courses to meet the needs of the students. The building has two floors and thirty-
four portables. The school is not over crowded but space is limited. Many incidents of violence are reported at this school and the peer mediation program is implemented as a proactive program to prevent violence in the school. Five teachers and one administrator are involved in this program. They meet weekly and they have trained ten students to be peer mediators. They have been struggling with the transfer of administrators who support the program. However, they continue to build on their efforts by introducing the program to staff and students and to meet regularly as a group of advisors to plan the revival of the program. At the time of the interviews the original program has been in existence for five years. The administrators and staff see the need for the program as a proactive measure because the school experiences a lot of violence.

**Bias and Ethics**

We all carry our baggage of beliefs and assumptions (Anderson, 1994) in whatever we do. I conducted this study with the belief and assumption that peer mediation has a positive impact on most students. These opinions are based on my personal successes with peer mediation programs in schools where I have worked. However, the successes of my programs may be due to my enthusiasm, hard work and devotion to the programs. Therefore, my beliefs and assumptions are limited to my experiences. I do not know if coordinators in other schools devote the same amount of time and energy to their programs and whether or not they are experiencing the same level of success. Hopefully, this investigation will provide me with that information. I was also conscious that my bias could have influenced my collection and analysis of data as well as the reporting of the findings. To overcome
these concerns I did not interview students or teachers from my school because I believe that if I had, the results could reflect my bias. I also did not interview teachers who I knew well and those who I know fully support peer mediation in schools. To include them, in my view, might have presented a one-sided perception of the peer mediation process, promote bias as well as unethical practices.

The transcripts and any other information pertaining to the study are safely stored. No one, except me, has access to the information that I acquired. The information on the computer is also secured by a private password (see Table 5).

**Limitations**

I am aware that my presence in the interview process might have affected the results of the study but it was very important to me that I did the interviews myself. I wanted to witness the emotions and feelings that the participants shared about the peer mediation process and I wanted to hear from the students. The participants were very comfortable with me and based on the descriptions of some gang related activities that some gang members shared, I am led to believe that they trusted me and believed that I would not use the information against them. This is why it was important to use pseudonyms.

It was unfortunate that more disputants did not volunteer to participate in the study and that so many other students did not know anything about the peer mediation program in their school. Also I believe that I could have presented a more rounded account of peer mediation if more teachers knew more about the process. As it turned out many knew very little about the process. The gender imbalance of those who participated is also a concern. I would have liked to have had a better
balance between the genders and more disputants but sufficient participants were not available to make this possible. Three disputants (one male and two females) refused to be interviewed. Their participation would have also provided a better balance of the genders. However, I am satisfied that the educators and the students interviewed were open and honest with me, and I stand behind my findings.

This study focuses on the mediators. It is an original study because it has not been previously done. Nevertheless, certain situations created limitations for this study. They are as follows:

Lack of adequate resources on Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation in Secondary Schools.

Basic resources like dissertations on peer mediation and/or conflict resolution books, journals and reports relevant to the research were not available at the University of Toronto libraries. International loans of dissertations requested were limited and efforts to overcome this limitation were very expensive. Three research trips were made to the United States. In addition, attendance at Conflict Resolution conferences was essential to keep current in the field of conflict resolution and peer mediation. All the books, journals and articles needed for this research were purchased from the United States.

Lack of Uniformity of Peer Mediation programs

There were differences in the selection, training and implementation of the programs in each school. These differences may have affected the results of the study. To prevent this limitation affecting the study, each program is treated as a
Table 5

**CATEGORIES**
(From interviews)

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This table illustrates the recurring themes during the interviews. Violence in school was most often referred to and was of greatest concern of all the participants.
separate and unique program.

**Loyalty to School**

There may have been a tendency for students to use the interview process to promote their school or the mediation program in their school. To avoid this from happening I explained to the students at the beginning of the interviews that their peer mediation program and their school were not being evaluated but that the purpose of the study was to investigate what happens during the mediation process. Also only 18 year-olds were interviewed and all interviews were conducted outside of the school buildings. Hopefully, it was easier for 18 year-olds to be objective in their interview about the program.

**Trust**

It may have been difficult for some students to trust, and/or to be honest and open, to a stranger (me). To help the students trust, I encouraged them to be honest because their answers would not have any impact on them or on their school. In addition, they were told that the information they shared would be kept as confidential and would be destroyed when the study is completed.

It was unfortunate this study was conducted during the teachers’ unrest, (1997 to present), and so the school climate at most schools was not conducive to research. Not many teachers were willing to participate in any type of research. However, some were happy to participate. The most striking limitations were the timing and the lack of resources.
The timing of the teachers' unrest.

Due to the teachers' strikes, work-to-rule, constant interruptions in the schools and the lack of extra-curricular activities for students, the peer mediation programs did not function this academic year. Students were recruited outside of school and school time. Most peer mediation coordinators were not willing to cooperate or help in any way with the research as a part of their protest against the system and the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Lack of sufficient resources

Therefore, it was a very expensive study because of the limited resources on peer mediation and conflict resolution at the OISE and the University of Toronto libraries. All books used for this study were purchased or borrowed from the United States of America and many US libraries were visited to research my thesis topic. Some libraries visited were Boston Law library, Columbia Law library and Ohio Law library. In order to keep current, I also attended annual international conferences to gain some access to new materials in the field. That was also an additional expense for resources.

Summary

This chapter discusses the nature of the qualitative method of research. It justifies the use of this method and illustrates why the qualitative method is best suited for this particular type of research. A brief description is provided of the interview process, the data analysis and the participants of the study and their school community. It reveals a lot about the challenges that some school advisors
face in order to implement the peer mediation programs in their schools and tells of the respective approaches of some administrators to peer mediation. The history of each program is also provided in a limited form for some schools. Again the information gathered from the schools tells of the need for a study of this type and the urgency to educate educators about peer mediation.
CHAPTER 4
UNDERSTANDING THE GOALS OF PEER MEDIATION

Peer mediation refers to a process of peers (mediators) resolving the conflicts of their peers (disputants). Most educators will agree that students tend to influence the thinking of their peers. This has led Koch (1988) to say that when resolving disputes, students, once they are trained, can do it better and in addition they can reach their peers in ways that adults cannot get to them (Crawford & Bodine, 1996). What follows is the perceptions of peer mediators, disputants and other students about the concept of peer mediation.

WHAT IS PEER MEDIATION?

Peer mediators are more knowledgeable about peer mediation than many educators. When asked, “What is Mediation,” they were more informative, accurate and passionate about the process than the educators. They described mediation as a program or a method of: helping others to solve their problems peacefully; resolving a conflict before it gets anywhere; solving problems; talking; bringing people together who have a conflict to work out; and as making peace. Their answers also reflected their knowledge and experience in the process. The following are some of the students’ views on mediation.

Eighteen-year-old Sherry attends a secondary school of more than 2,500 students (School F). As a mediator she has seen and experienced a lot. In her school there are daily fights and visits from the police. This is what she said about mediation:
To me and the way that I know mediation, it's solving problems through talking without using violence or anything physical. It's a conflict that you can resolve. It's talking about it, getting the underlying issues and emotions out in the open so that they can be solved and that might quench any physical fights or whatever that are going on but getting out the emotions is the root of the issue.

She speaks with some authority on mediation because she has been a mediator since the opening of her school five years ago. She believes that peer mediation is the only hope for peace in her school and in the world because she has seen the difference that the program has made in her school community. She is an advocate of the theory that talk works (Kolb, 1994).

Another common perception of mediation is that it solves conflicts. June is a very experienced peer mediator in another very large secondary school of more than 2,300 students (School E). She has undergone extensive peer mediation training of more than 300 hours since her grade nine days. June, now eighteen years old, can best reflect on mediation because she has also seen her school move from extreme violence before the implementation of the mediation program to a shift of total peace after the implementation of a peer mediation program. Her experiences augment the Conflict-Positive Organization of Tjosvold (1991) where the management of conflict stimulates diversity and creates unity. Her school which was considered by the police a few years ago as the most violent school in the neighbourhood, is now recognized by the police and parents as the most peaceful and safe school in the same neighbourhood. She credits the mediation program for the dramatic shift to peace. In response to the question, "What is Mediation?" she proclaims:
Mediation is bringing together two people who are having a conflict and they need to work out their problems. It is simply getting out everything on the table and learning what the problem is, sorting through the facts and the feelings and basically just trying to help them solve their conflicts.

Both Sherry and June stressed the importance of “putting everything on the table” and getting the facts, feelings and emotions out in order to truly solve the conflict.

The mediators made reference to conflict getting out of control. They believe that mediation can prevent conflict from escalating into violence. This is how Marvin describes mediation. He says:

Mediation is trying to resolve a conflict before it gets anywhere that’s uncontrollable. It’s the first step to try to bring the truth (out) between disputants. It’s a way to make them see each others’ faults; see what could have been done differently if they had just approached the problem differently from a different perspective, from a different handle. Just open their eyes to whole other points of views. Once you do that then mediation just basically answers that person’s question and as the process goes on, mediation comes shining through.

Marvin told me that mediation can solve any problem. He believes that no problem is too difficult for mediation to solve and that everyone can win (Cornelius and Faire, 1989). This explains why he stresses the importance of getting the truth from the disputants. For him, the truth will “set them free” because mediation, once given the truth to work with, will “open” the eyes of the disputants and enable them to see different perspectives. This coincides with Zehr (1990) when he urges society to change their lenses in their perception of the justice system for young offenders.

Shirley, an experienced mediator, has a similar perception to that of Marvin on mediation and problem solving. Shirley knows about mediation. She has more than 200 hours of mediation training and has mediated more than fifty conflicts in a school community where there are daily conflicts. She says,

Mediation is helping other people solve their conflicts. You guide
them through what they would normally do by themselves if they were calm enough.

Shirley brings to light an important point about how we should solve problems. Her answer supports the theory that the mediator only controls the process while the disputants control the outcome.

It is through conflicts that we will find peace (Mastellone, 1993). Mediation is pro peace says mediator Nancy. Mediation for Nancy, is talking.

A peaceful conflict resolution. It’s resolving a problem between people, talking through it, just letting everything out into the open and then moving on from there.

Nancy says that mediation means “no violence, it’s really peace.” Nancy was a mediator in two different schools. Over her seven years as a trained mediator in these schools she has never mediated. The mediations that she was assigned to never happened because one disputant was always away from school and the advisors finally gave up after trying to get both disputants together on a number of occasions. However, she has seen the effects of mediation in both school communities. Nancy told me that she has seen the school communities change from conflicted environments to places where disputes are handled more positively. Her description also fits that of Dean Tjosvold’s (1991) Conflict-Positive Organization where diversity is stimulated and unity created.

Some disputants say that the peer mediation program in their school is creating peace. The responses of two disputants to the question, “What is Mediation?” support the above perception. One disputant says, “It’s (Mediation is) when someone is fighting someone and you guys come together to make peace.”
The disputant means that mediating is a process that keeps the peace when there is a fight. English is the second language of the student and it was difficult for the student to clearly express or differentiate between what mediation is and what it does but in the interview I understood the student to be expressing the ideas stated earlier.

The other disputant describes mediation as an approach to help students in conflict solve their problems. She explains, “Mediation to me is a program in which I help other students solve their conflicts or whatever problems they have.” The latter disputant has experienced both worlds of mediation. She was once a disputant who experienced the mediation process. Later she voluntarily requested to be trained as a mediator and has been a mediator for the past two years. She supports mediation because she believes in it. Not all students do, however. Some students have only heard the P.A. announcement to join mediation but they have never seen it work nor do they know what it is about. One student when asked, “What is mediation?” explained that he doesn’t know anything about peer mediation. I asked, " Do you hear about peer mediation?" His response was, "Over the announcements they say if anyone wants to be a peer mediator go to the chaplain. That's it.” The program coordinator of that school tells me that they have had a program for the past four years. However, when I asked the same student, “If you had a fight would you go to mediation?” the answer was, “Maybe, probably, yes.” Another student from the same school said that he has never heard of mediation. A third student who is also from the same school but who has never been involved in a conflict disclosed the following:
I heard of mediation, don't fight back, do unto others as you wish them to do unto you. I have heard of it all my life at school and church.

The same student said, “It is better to solve problems or you would hurt another person, better to solve the problem or you might get hurt.” A peer of the same age and grade said that he had heard of mediation since he was in grade nine. When asked if he would go to mediation he declared:

Yes, I would go to mediation but I already know what they are going to say, but I just don't listen. I listen, I understand but I just don't do it.

This was the general attitude of students who are involved in gang activities.

Some students told me that they belong to a gang and that they prefer to fight than to talk. They have not given mediation a chance. Many do not believe that talk works but some do. However, those who believe do not use mediation because it would not be accepted by their gang members. What is obvious from the interviews with students in gangs is that, given the opportunity and encouragement they would, like the gangs in New Mexico (Smith & Keeney, 1996), use mediation to resolve their conflicts. The New Mexico Centre for Dispute Resolution mediate gang conflicts in schools because they believe that suspending and expelling individual students for gang-related violations might result in short-term benefits to the school, but would not eliminate the problem. In response to the question, “Have you heard of Mediation?,” one gang member interviewed had the following to say:

Ya. I try. We try using it but people are usually so angry they just want to let the anger out so that's how they react to it and it is not good. It is not good at all because I have done that mistake. I've reacted with anger taking it out with my hands, my fist in a fight and it's not good. You realize after, ya you knocked them out, you're happy, you're gonna get your respect because you didn't get knocked out but at the end you end up losing because the police gonna tell your parents and that's when big
problems start and the way to solve it is talking. Honestly, I’ve realized, the way to solve problems like that is talking and if they don’t want to listen, then just walk away.

Students in gangs seem to have a different meaning for the word, “respect” than most others in society. Winning a fight, from his perspective, is gaining respect and power. When I asked, “Can, mediation work?” He said, “yes.”

Based on my interviews with students, it was easy to see four categories of users with varying meaning of the mediation program. The categories are the mediators who mediate, the disputants who use the service, those who are never in a conflict but may use the service of the mediators if they had to, and those who will not use mediation because of their desire to “get respect” by winning a fight and gaining “power” and “prestige” as defined by their peers. This latter minority is usually the hardest to serve and those most needing mediation because of the frequency of their fights. However, they do not rule out the possibility of using mediation because they see its value to their peers and to the school community.

All the students interviewed, including those who do not use mediation, believe that peer mediation can create peaceful and non-violent schools. Do most educators have the same faith in the peer mediation process? The measure of their belief in the program is reflected in their response to the question: Do you support peer mediation? Why?

_Educator Support for Peer Mediation_

The educators in these samples are teachers, non-teaching staff and administrators. There are two categories of administrators. One category of administrators are co-ordinators of the peer mediation program. They are involved
with the selection, training and general operation of the peer mediation program.

The second category of administrators has no connection to the peer mediation program.

A total of seven teachers were interviewed. Except for one teacher, all teachers support the peer mediation program without reservations because they have seen the difference that it makes in their school. The teacher who is reserved about the peer mediation process supports the concept of peer mediation because he acknowledges that peers listen to peers more than they listen to adults. He says,

I support peer mediation up to a point because kids tend to listen more to their peers than to their parents but everything else depends on who are the friends because if they have good friends ... I have seen cases being resolved in class where a good kid was recommending another good friend (to) good things.

I asked the teacher to explain the extent to which he supports peer mediation and why. His response was as follows:

Well, I think there should be a line. If they (the students) don't listen too much to you then maybe there should be an alternative to peer mediation. If they won't listen to me they might listen to the peers but everything depends on who the peers are. If the person within the peer mediation is a good person then you can have positive results. However, if the person is not a very good (person) then it can cause negative results.

I will refer to this teacher as the “reluctant teacher.” The reluctant teacher refers to “a good person” and “bad person” without defining either. I did not ask for clarification because I felt that he had a reluctance to answer the questions I posed and I did not want to appear to be biased or to be pushing a certain point of view.

In this case the researcher is the “middleman,” a translator and interpreter of culture
The teachers who support the peer mediation program did so for a variety of reasons. Some are pro-student. For example one female teacher said that she supports the peer mediation program because “It’s good for the kid to have someone in the middle to negotiate and to help them find the right words.” Some support the peer mediation program because of its value to the classroom. The following is why one male teacher supports peer mediation:

I support it (peer mediation) fully because I have seen the value of it. In the classroom and in the years that I have spent teaching (more than 20 years) I have seen that when kids get together they come up with the best solutions to mediate problems that they face. Of course I have not seen them involved in mediating severe violent problems but from what I have seen in the classroom it works effectively and efficiently.

My follow-up question was, “What have you seen in your classroom?” his response was:

I have seen minor disputes over territory, over books, over attitude and I have seen that when you ask these kids why are they acting in that manner and suggest that they themselves, solve it (the problem) they do.

This teacher related a number of incidents when he had conflicts in his class. In each case he had allowed the non-conflicting students to join a group with the students who have the conflicts, to “look” at their problem and to come up with a solution. This teacher may be unaware that he is using a method of conflict resolution called, “Healing Circles” which originated from the North American Indians.

The Aboriginal Healing Circles and Family Group Conferences have been part of the Native tradition for centuries. Aboriginal circles are now being shared and
used in restorative justice systems all over North America. His style of providing the opportunity to heal hurts is also an example of the restorative system which focuses not on punishment but on restoring relationship between the parties and with the rest of the community (Conbere, 1994, Sharpe, 1998). The teacher is also advocating the theory of transformative mediation (Bush & Folger, 1994) by allowing change and healing to take place.

Another teacher supports the peer mediation program because it saves administrators' time. He said:

Anyway you can resolve conflict without referring to the principal or the vice principals, I figure it's good. The kids relate to themselves and they relate to order and to the ones that are mature. I figure it helps.

As an advocate of the program he said, "Yes, I most definitely support the program. I have been involved in peer mediation here (at the school) for about two years and it was a very, very worthwhile process. I most definitely support it. I do." When asked why, he explained:

Well, the experiences that I had were very rewarding. I actually thought that it mediated conflicts and it further provided the vice principals to do more private work. So, that is one of the main reasons why I support it.

Again I wondered how much of the support for administration was due to the fact that I was an administrator. Despite possible "political talk" some teachers interviewed seemed to genuinely believe that the program reduces violence. One teacher, whose daughter is a peer mediator in another school, has seen the positive impact that the peer mediation process has made to the life of her teenager. She said:

I absolutely support the peer mediation program because I think it is
a good vehicle to resolve conflicts before they get too difficult to handle.

A teacher from a very large school said, "I do support the peer mediation program because I think it is a good idea for young people to try to resolve problems with young people." Teachers interviewed were very supportive of the program for reasons that made sense to them.

Administrators who are not connected with the peer mediation program support the peer mediation program because they have seen the positive benefits that it has on the school community and on their time. Five administrators involved in a study on peer mediation reported that 95% less administrative time was used for minor disciplinary problems in schools where there is a mediation program (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). They also saw the benefits to their school. One principal in my study had a similar response:

I do support the program. I have seen the benefits of it. I have seen it as a part of the safe school action plan being critical in turning the school around from a school known for its violence and parents perceptions of its violence activities to one now where parents see it as the safest school in the local community. Much safer than all the neighbourhood schools.

This school is a showcase for peer mediation in the school board. The successes of the program are very obvious and striking in this school which, as the principal said, was a very violent school. There has been a shift in attitude towards fights, violence and peace in that school. In another school, the administrator support the program because she believes that it can do no harm, it only helps the students. Although the vice principal says she does not use it regularly, she had the following to say:

There are times when I find it useful from my perspective to help the students and it assists me to deal with discipline at the same time and
I find that when there is mediation the results are more long-lasting when it is successful. So yes, I do support the program.

Some administrators, like the one cited above, use peer mediation instead of the traditional strategies to help with disciplinary concerns. Another administrator takes the process further by combining peer mediator with suspensions. In his school, peer mediation comes after a suspension. That implies that suspension may not be the answer. The conflict is brought to some closure on the student’s return to school so that the respect and peace within the school community may be maintained. This administrator believes in mediation because he has seen its effectiveness (Jones & Kmita, 1998; Cunningham, 1997; Anticoli, 1997). The principal interviewed in my study also believes in mediation for the same reason.

This is what he had to say about his support for mediation:

I believe in it because of the fact that I have seen the results. I have seen what happened at a previous school in terms of the harmony that it created in the school and the reduction in fights, racial tensions and family matters and the many issues that the program can deal with.

The values of the administrators emerged as they identified with different aspects of the mediation process. One administrator supports the program because peer mediation brings to light the truth. In response to the question, “Do you support the peer mediation program?” he said:

Oh, It's an excellent program. I support the program because it tends to bring to light first of all the truth about a situation. Sometimes the truth is distorted by students and that is what you get in the background and fights begin because of the distortion of the information that they received, So the program is excellent in terms of getting students to bring the truth out of a situation.

This administrator can speak with authority about the program because he has worked in two different schools where there has been a program. This
administrator's value of "right" and "wrong" emerged from the interview. Roche's (1996) research project found that principals frequently deal with numerous issues and situations that are value laden. The decision to use or not use mediation as an alternative to traditional consequences is preference based on the administrator's values (Hogkinson, 1991). This is mostly done by those who know and understand the concept of mediation.

Administrators who understand how the peer mediation works are excited about it and they promote it in their school. This was quite evident when I spoke with the administrators who have chosen to be the coordinators of the peer mediation program in their school. In each case, these administrators introduced the program to their school. They have been involved with the program since its introduction to the school community and they are actively involved in the selection and the training of the students each year. They are the ones who promote its use. One perception that arose from the interviews was that in schools where the goals of the peer mediation program were clear to the students and staffs there were greater chances of its success. Where the goals were fuzzy, the program was not usually effective because there was no vision without a goal. Only if others know what we want can they support the manager (Block, 1987, 109).

GOALS OF THE PROGRAM

The participants identified twelve different goals of the peer mediation program. They include getting people to talk about their feelings; resolving disputes/conflicts; instilling the habit of thinking before acting; having students take ownership for their problems; promoting peaceful, harmonious, safe and better
schools; providing co-curricular activities; providing a re-entry plan after suspension, teaching students how to resolve problems in the future; preventing violence; helping people to be more open; learning problem solving skills and learning listening skills. The responses varied depending on who was speaking.

One administrator summed up the goals of the peer mediation program when he said:

The goals of the program first of all are to get people talking again, to resolve disputes and to instill in kids the understanding that they must think before they act whether it is a verbal battle (or not) they must research the information they get before they take a stand. Basically, that’s what it is. They act on the spur of the moment and that is what causes the problem so peer mediation teaches them not to act drastically. Research! Do some finding out, (ask) is what I am hearing true? And very often, do you know what it is? It is “He said, she said, the other one said” something about me and when we go back a few steps we realize that the whole story was a misunderstanding and was distorted and the student fought and had a verbal battle and later realized that the rumour wasn’t true. He/she didn’t say that after all.

A group dynamics is very important to bring that out.

The point is clearly made that mediation accomplishes a range of goals and that Talk Works (Kolb, 1994). All participants stress the goals of resolving conflicts and preventing violence. The literature supports the point that peer mediation can help to prevent violence in schools. Donald Anticoli’s (1997) dissertation on “School Violence Intervention: The Role of Peer Mediation in Diminishing Disputant Recidivism,” concluded that the results that peer mediation is most effective in settling minor disputes between students before they reach the physical fighting stage which would normally result in an out-of-school suspension for the students (p. 91).

One administrator interviewed stressed that one goal of the peer mediation program is to “maintain some kind of a re-entry plan” after suspension, so that when
the students return from a suspension due to a fight they do not return with the hostilities. For this administrator, peer mediation also creates harmony in the school and it teaches students how to deal with conflicts (Roher, 1997, p. 194). She said, “if there are conflicts they know exactly how to resolve it in the future.”

One principal supports the goal of peer mediation to include resolving conflicts and preventing violence. He spoke with confidence about the peer mediation program and could relate many incidents about when the peer mediation program made a tremendous difference in his life and the life of the members of the school community. When asked about the goals of the program he said:

The goals are to resolve conflict and violence and to help students in those resolutions to make school a more peaceful place and it has done that, no doubt about it, and also to give a number of students who otherwise might not have been involved in any kind of co-curricular activity the chance to get involved and learn new skills because this is a very safe group for students to belong to.

Other participants also stressed that peer mediation resolves conflict and keeps “the peace” within a school community. This fits with the concept of “Making School a Place of Peace” by Bey & Turner (1996). A female administrator told me that the goal of the program is “really to try and keep peace in the school.” She said that when things are brewing the administrators in her school use peer mediation as a preventative measure to get the students together to try and resolve the conflicts. She said that once an issue has come out, once the conflict is there, it is important to try to resolve it. For her “the goal is peace but it is both preventative and dealing with the problem once it has occurred.” Some administrators emphasized the importance of students having an input into the decisions made, about the
resolution of the conflict and the maintenance of peace.

The goals of the peer mediation program, from the perspective of a coordinator of the program, are “to maintain peace within the school community and to teach the students how to resolve their conflicts and the conflicts of their peers.” These were recurring answers among other administrators, teachers and students. They all want, says a mediator, “kids to resolve their conflicts and to get to the root of the matter not leaving it fermenting right there so that it keeps cropping up again and again.” One peer mediator had the following to say:

The main goal of the peer mediation program is to prevent violence in that they (disputants) would be resolving conflicts through talking or just conversation. They too will be preventing more conflicts from happening because I think when people did go through mediation they entered their conflicts. They’re more rational of the problems that occur through conflicts and because of irrational decisions and behaviour.

Another mediator said, “if you can talk about something, then it can be lifted from you. It’s not as big a worry.” The same mediator feels that the goal is to get students talking, even if they don’t agree to agree. She said the goal is:

To resolve things and just nonviolence. Even if they don’t get resolved as long as there are in mediation talking about it, they are not out there fighting. The goal of getting them in there and just talking it out and verbalizing their own problems so it’s not all misunderstanding and miscommunication and everything. That’s why I think it (peer mediation) is great. Even if you are not going to be a friend with the person when you talk you know that you have had your say and you have confronted them in a nonviolent way and you can kinda let it go.

The students are finding peace through conflict (Mastellone, 1993). “Our goals,” says an experienced mediator, “are basically to teach peace in schools, and in our society so that when we grow up we can have a peaceful society so that we can walk anytime and not be scared of other people.” The students care about their school environment. They want harmony in their classrooms, in the halls and within
the school community. The students interviewed spoke a lot about the need for this type of peace and they see peer mediation as the only source of such peace. The students are supporting the themes in the book entitled, “Waging Peace in our Schools” (Lantieri & Patti, 1996). The following response to the goals of the peer mediation program illustrates my point. This is what a peer mediator from a large school said:

The goals of the peer mediation program are to provide a better environment in school, a better environment for everybody, the people in conflict, the people who may not be directly involved but indirectly as with friends or teachers because they have to deal with say two people fighting in a class. It’s (mediation) to provide closure on issues, provide more safety for people, give them an outlet to talk and to solve problems and hopefully have everybody a little happier.

There are many who, like the students interviewed, support educating for a peaceful world (Deutsch, 1993), restorative justice (Sharpe, 1998; Schmidt, Friedman, Marvel, 1992), teaching the feeling of peace (Compton, 1994), healing (Montville, 1997) and social justice and racial harmony (McCormick, 1997). They too see mediation leading the way to a peaceful world. Conflicts involving prejudice are a common occurrence in many Schools (Cohen, 1999). Cohen says that so-called “racial” conflicts are not a new problem for North American educators, but many feel they are occurring with more frequency. He claims that the United States and Canada now have the most heterogeneous student body ever. Some urban schools have as many as eighty different ethnic backgrounds represented among their students, and urban schools also report more diversity than in the past. This cultural diversity represents a resource of tremendous potential for educators (Cohen, 1999, p. 23). Ryan & Wignall (1994) see the difficulties that administrators
face in a multicultural setting because "understanding other ethnocultural perspectives is not always easy - or for that matter, possible. Despite valiant efforts, educators may never totally comprehend ethnocultural perspectives that differ radically from their own" (p. 14). In a multicultural school this understanding of differences is essential to maintain peaceful schools and the leadership in this area must come from the administrators. This explains why Ryan and Wignall (1994) say, "As part of their roles administrators will likely have to devote substantial efforts to understanding different perspectives, particularly in schools that serve a wide range of ethnocultural groups" (p. 14). On the other hand, some like Koch (1988) see students as the better peacemakers. He believes that students can resolve disputes better than adults.

The teaching of problem solving skills was another very strong theme that emerged as a goal of the peer mediation program. One coordinator of a mediation program said that the goal of the program is to teach the tools of conflict resolution "so in turn they (mediators) will use those tools to give to other kids so that they can have some problem solving skills of their own." The US and Canadian research findings (Johnson & Johnson 1996; Jones & Kmita, 1998; Cunningham, 1997) support the theme that the teaching of problem solving skills is an important goal of peer mediation programs. Teachers spoke of the goals of the peer mediation as a method to teach listening skills, and to help students deal effectively with their peers.

Some of the participants believe that peer mediation should teach responsibility. One teacher said, "I think another of the goals of the program is for
kids to take responsibility for their own selves, their own acts and their own
thoughts." He related a few violent incidents that happened in his classroom. He
referred to the students taking responsibility for their actions in the following way:

The goals I think would be to make kids more aware, to think before
they act, to think while they are acting, and to depend on their own
age group to see the problems that they face.

He says that after a certain incident when the students had to take the
responsibility for their conflicts in his class, it became common practice for them
to manage their own conflicts. One student who was involved in a previous
conflict said, "Sir, you now know that I know I must think before I do something
silly." Another administrator from another school said the same thing. He said
that the goal of the program is to help the students take ownership for their
problem rather than have someone make the decisions for them. In so doing, he
says the process helps the mediators involved to learn leadership skills so that it
is not always an adult telling them what to do. The experiences also teach
citizenship responsibilities and make the students a part of the safe school

A teacher who is exposed to some peer mediators in his class tells me
that the students who are mediators in his class are as convinced, as Cornelius
& Faire (1989), that everyone can win in their effort to resolve conflicts.

Some students also see the goals of the peer mediation program as a
means to teach other skills other than how to resolve conflicts. One mediator
said:

The goals of the peer mediation program are to help people be more
open and responsive to each other and to just try to be more
communicative with other people.

The student's comments fit the theories of the social psychologist Morton Deutsch (1995) in his work on "Conflict, Cooperation and Justice." In this work he states that critical issues in the resolution of unrest are conflict, cooperation and justice. This is the openness and responsiveness that the student described. One mediator said that mediation aims to make a person "stronger" morally and spiritually (Zumeta, 1993). She also says that it brings people together which is also related to the work of Deutsch and of Fisher (1997). Fisher calls the bringing together of groups interactive conflict resolution. Another student spoke of the satisfaction that mediation gives to students because of the service that they provide to others. Most students and staff in the schools where the interviews were conducted seemed to know the goals of the peer mediation program. For example, a student interviewed who has never been in trouble, never been to the office for any type of problem and who has never been to mediation, also knew the goals of the peer mediation program. The student said:

The goals of the mediation program are that they (the mediators) are trying to resolve problems and teach students how to not use violence and how to solve problems in other ways, maybe learn to solve problems themselves without teachers' authority.

The themes that emerged from the students interviews about the goals of the program focused on a peaceful school, peaceful environment and improved communication between others. Some administrators are listening to the students and the demands of the public for peaceful schools. As a result, they have implemented peer mediation programs in their schools for a variety of reasons.
REASONS FOR IMPLEMENTING A PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM

Six main reasons were identified for having a peer mediation program in the schools. They are: to provide student leadership; to reduce and prevent violence; to develop life-long skills; to resolve conflicts between peers; as a re-entry plan after a suspension; and to utilize expertise of staff members. Except for the principal in the study, all the other administrators focused on peer mediation as a preventative method to reduce violence in their schools. The principal looked at the larger picture. He says:

There are several reasons why we would have a peer mediation program. One would be to provide opportunities to develop student leadership; opportunities in an area that will be a life-long learning opportunity. That they will develop skills and trained in areas that will help them in the school, in their homes and later in life. Another primary reason is to assist in the resolution of the number of conflicts that exist in the school or had existed in the past, to reduce the amount of violence within the school and to assist students in resolving conflicts within themselves rather than have decisions imposed on them because we know that there is a much better chance of being successful if the students can resolve them themselves rather than an administrator posing a consequence or decision on them because that does not solve the conflict it might even increase the potential for greater conflict. There are lots of reasons why we had it. We were also very fortunate to have some leadership in the school where they had training previously in areas which assisted us greatly in the development of the program. So there are various reasons then, to give students an opportunity to develop leadership skills, to get training for lifelong learning, to resolve conflicts and violence within the school community, and to make use of the support previously in our school community.

The principal gave six reasons why he introduced the peer mediation program in his school. However, for the purpose of this discussion, the reasons are categorized under three headings: leadership, resolving conflicts and re-entry after a suspension.

Leadership

The first reason for using peer mediation is that it nurtures leadership.
Leadership emerges from two sources: students and staff. The students develop life-long skills through their peer mediation training. Based on the findings of this study, those skills influence students' behaviour in and out of school. The peer mediators say that they apply the peer mediation skills to different daily problems and conflicts and that the skills help them to communicate better with their parents, teachers, friends and peers. At the same time, staff expertise in conflict resolution and peer mediation complements the newly acquired conflict resolution skills of the students (mediators). This principal had a conflict resolution trainer on staff. As a result, the students and staff were perhaps more informed than other schools in the district about the value of peer mediation to their school community. The principal’s response to the question reflects a sound knowledge of the program. To him the peer mediation program does more than prevent violence but in some other school communities the peer mediation program appears to be used mostly to prevent violence.

**Resolving Conflicts**

The second reason is that peer mediation is believed to resolve conflicts. One administrator spoke of a student/student conflict. He said, “We have a peer mediation program to assist students to resolve some of the problems and some of the conflicts that they come across in the school.” The administrators consistently told me that they implemented peer mediation in their school communities to resolve disputes. An administrator’s reason is, “Most of all to resolve disputes between kids either verbally or nonverbally or physically.” Other administrators had similar responses. For example, one administrator said that peer mediation provides
a method of problem solving in conflict situations. He explained:

I think it helps to solve some of their own problems
to be part of the solution to the problems they are
encountering. So, it's for them, to help them work
through these situations so they do not always
have the direct adult intervention where they are guiding
them or leading them either through the training. It's
primarily for the students to help them learn how to work
through a problem on their own and through the assistance
of their peers.

People in two of the eight schools said that all of their conflicts have been
successfully mediated. One coordinator said, "I can't think of any situation that we
weren't able to solve." An administrator from a school of more than 2,000 students
said the same thing. She said, "All are resolved. Some take more time than others."
Participants who say that not all conflicts are resolved describe the unresolved
conflicts. A coordinator from School H explains that sometimes these conflicts are
over very simple things.

It only happened twice in the five years we have been running this
(program). One was so stupid it was over a muffin that was thrown
at someone in the cafeteria. The person ducked and it hit another
person and it all went down to the pride issue. They refused to back
down and forgive and these were OACs. There was one other one
which was a minor silly thing. It was two guys who were friends for
ever. I can't remember what the issue was they decided they were
not going to resolve it. One was ready to leave the school before
he had to talk to that guy again but for the most part the most of
them have been resolved and they haven't come back a second time.

This conversation supports the opinion of another administrator who works in an
even larger school. He believes too that conflicts that are not resolved are the ones
that people in conflict do not want to resolve. He had the following to say

I think the conflicts that don't get resolved are the ones that people
do not want to get resolved. I really think it is in the hands of the
people who want to do it and if they don't want to do it, it really
doesn't matter how many times you take them to the water, they
are not gonna drink it if they don't want to.

June, a mediator, said that conflicts get more difficult to resolve when disputants have a history of not getting along. She explained

Conflicts that do not get resolved are when both people have repeatedly had problems with each other and just simply cannot get along there is no way for them to have a friendship of any kind so the best way to handle that would be to say there are rules in which they avoid each other and do not disturb each others lives in anyway and basically to avoid any type of conflicts in the school.

Marvin presents another perspective. He says that all the information that has any bearing on the conflict must be brought to the table for discussion. Unless that happens those conflicts will not be resolved. He explained

Conflicts that do not get resolved are conflicts that all the facts are not brought out by probably, not one but both disputants because if all the facts are not out no matter what we do what we say, the disputants are always going to have at the back of their heads yow! She didn't apologize for that, she didn't do (that) because we don't know about that. It stays in their heads and there is never a resolution. There is always a grudge or some kind of a reprisal being taken whenever time they leave the room.

Bunny believes that if one disputant is not in agreement with the other disputant the conflict cannot be solved. She relates it to a good marriage. People must be on the same level of thinking. She said

You can't resolve it if one person is not into resolving it. You can only resolve it if both have committed. It's just like anything else like it's a marriage, it's a friendship, it's anything. It can only work if both people are dedicated to resolving it. You can't make someone make an agreement if they are not into it. They won't keep it. They won't mean anything if both are not committed to it. To finish the whole thing and figuring it out so that's the kind of conflict if one is just determined not to help the process. If one wants to save the friendship then one does it you can't make them. So, that's when it doesn't get resolved if one person is just dedicated to being very annoying and not trying to work it out. If that's the way they fight to just cut the other person off then you can't help that you can make someone talk. They would just laugh it off. You can just say, "Ha, one of the rules is that you both want to be here and if you don't want to be here, I can't do anything."
Sherry explains that the way that the agreements in her school are constructed, everything has some closure. She defines her perception of what it means to resolve a conflict. She explained:

The way we build our contract (agreement), everything has some ending, some kind of closure. Not resolved to me means they agree to go their separate ways and not look at each other, agree to disagree, ignore each other and when they see each other coming down the hallway each of you on each side of the hallway, straight ahead, don’t look at each other, don’t talk to each other. That is something that I would say is not resolved because while there is something there you have not been able to hit it yet and with the other mediation they didn’t know each other so it was solved by them totally staying away from each other. Because of the contract that we had everything has a final ending and a final closure.

One administrator said that long standing feuds may not be solved by mediation.

He relates his views as follows:

I guess if it’s a long, long standing feud, if it has been going on for years it will not get resolved by mediation. I guess the longer it has gone on the more difficult it is to mediate it. If it’s more a misunderstanding, a bump in the halls and it was misinterpreted or perceived a different way those seem to be the easier ones. Just give them an opportunity to express how they felt about it and then usually we can resolve and work through those, but I find its the ones with a long history involved between them that are more difficult to resolve.

When the conflicts get to this advanced state mediation can only resolve the conflicts if the disputants are prepared to talk. Conflict left unresolved over a long period often festers, and like a cancer, take root and may develop into more hurt or hate. That explains why getting students to agree to disagree is a good sign because it often results from each party acknowledging the opinions of the other. Getting students to talk is voluntary and it is desirable for the mediation process to be successful. They also must go to mediation prepared to compromise and with a commitment to resolve their differences. Students go to mediation to avoid a
suspension at times defeat the purpose of the mediation. These situations do not get the conflicts resolved. The following experience of an administrator illustrates the point.

I know that two students that I sent to mediation not too long ago probably about a week ago and said to them, “You have a chance of a suspension or you can try working it out through mediation.” Of course, they both chose mediation but my feelings with one of the students is he wasn’t genuinely convinced of that. He didn’t feel that what he did was really wrong and he was really anxious to listen to the other person; it’s not the first time that he has done it. Basically, it was bothering another student. He said, “Yes, I pushed him because I didn’t like the way he looked at me;” and when I inquired later through the coordinator how the mediation went she responded. “With that student A it was kind of a waste of time because he just went through the motions.” What they had done was not that bad to be suspended although it could have been and even through the mediation may not have been that successful it would have been too late really to suspend so we just let that one go and see if it reoccurs.

The coordinator described a situation that mediation could not resolve because one party was not there for the right reason. This explains why mediation is voluntary and why both parties in the conflict must want to resolve the issue in order for the mediation process to work. When disputes happen out of school all parties in the conflict are not available to the school authorities if some parties do not attend the school. In situations like these, when only some of the disputing parties are available those, conflicts do not get resolved through mediation. This was the experience of one of the administrators interviewed. He shared the following:

I guess conflicts that started outside of school and involved more people in the community do not get resolved in school-based mediation. Certainly, with two students who had a conflict as a result of something that happened during the weekend, in some cases do not get resolved because when they go back into the peer group outside of the school environment it starts up again. So those sometimes do not get resolved.

The interviews suggest to me that mediation resolves issues when students are willing to “let go” of a dispute. Those issues that emerge are deep hurts that have
not been forgiven remain unresolved, regardless if mediated or not. It seems fair to conclude that if disputants are willing to forgive each other, then mediation may resolve most or all conflicts. Some group conflicts may not be resolved by mediation. Bonny also experienced groups of students against each other. She mediated one of those sessions. She explained:

I personally remember doing one when there were three different girls and we took them in separately because it was sort of two girls and one gang up on the other. So, I don’t think it would be fair to the others to have a group against them. You aren’t really getting to people when they are in a group because they have the whole mob mentality or whatever, so you really have to separate them so that they can talk it out. So, that’s what we did and if there were more people we would try to pick the people that were having the problems. You know, like if it’s a group against a group. Ok who are the ring leaders and who are really having the problem with each other and who are just kinda following along. As I said, those following along are not really the problem, it’s just those that are really the core group that are really having the problem that you need to talk to. As sad as it is, especially if you are in elementary or grade 7 or 8. This stuff, a lot of it, is mob thing or it’s groups against groups and so you have to find out the things that start it off and who was involved when it started off and if you can resolve that then pretty much it can all be resolved with little things that happened since. You just have to take them in and if you get everyone, one on one, without this mob backing them up then you can just then get them to be honest about what’s going on and not just say things like, “well, I don’t like her.” You have to get deeper than that and you can’t, when there is a lot of people so you just can’t peer mediate when there are groups.

Bonny makes the point that students have to resolve their problems when she says, “Well, mediation or they can continue fighting and never talk to each other again. Mediation is the only school sponsored one (choice). Really, they either resolve it on their own with one apologizing or they just won’t be friends anymore.”

The mediators resolve many fights in schools. Therefore, it is important to this study to hear the various perspectives on fights. Administrators, in particular, say the physical fights, disruptive behaviour, verbal disagreements and harassment of all types are prevalent in schools. Some administrators say that fights happen daily
in their schools. An administrator of a school of more than 2000 students, who is also a coordinator of the peer mediation program, responded to the above question by saying

As a package they (physical fights, disruptive behaviour, verbal disagreements and nonverbal harassment) are quite frequent. In a sense of how frequent I would say probably daily, certainly every other day, some multiple on some days, but I can't think of a day when something like that hadn't happened to some degree.

In most schools the coordinators of the peer mediation programs are the first people to become aware of the fights that take place in the schools. They are the ones that teachers turn to first in order that they may maintain some sanity in their classrooms. These coordinators also say that fights take place daily. The following is what a coordinator of a school of less than 2000 students says

These violent acts are pretty common. Daily. There are many issues. Because we have mediators out there intervening, a lot of stuff does not come here (office) at all. Usually, we do a mediation each day or every other day. There is always something that we have to work with.

Not all school administration would, in the past, be prepared to keep an accurate account of the fights. This can be a political issue but some administrators/coordinators recognize the need for keeping accurate records of violent incidents that occur in schools. One coordinator said

No one knows for sure how much violence takes place in this school because incidents are not reported to any one source and it is not dealt with. Physical fights are not very frequent on school property because of the cameras. Disruptive behaviour is frequent but the solution here is suspension. Verbal agreements are frequent but it too is not addressed.

Teachers respond in a variety of ways to fights in their classroom. Some
intervene, some talk privately to the students themselves, and some send them to the administration. One teacher told me that students dare not fight in his classroom.

I don't have fights in my classroom. Students never dare fight in my class. Fight in your class automatically says not only do the students not have any respect for their peers but that they have no respect for you. Period. You know it happens, we are going to have dispute but at the same time I don't think you have to talk to the children when this happens you have to look at them and they know that the class is disturbed. Automatically, they will have to keep their voice down and forget about it. Whatever happens outside, I don't know but in my class I would tell you so far in 13 years I have not experienced any fights in my classroom.

Teachers of special programs tend to deal with disruptive behaviours in a special way because they use all opportunities as teaching tools. This teacher of a special education class wants the students to understand the inappropriateness of fighting in school so he allows the students to problem solve the disagreements that happen in his class. He gives an example. He said

Well, I will give you an example. This happened two weeks ago in my class right in this class. This is an ESL class and one student thought that another student looked at him in a funny way so I noticed that the student sat sulking and moping and just was not himself so I asked what was the matter. If something was wrong and the student kept muttering that nothing was wrong but at the same time he was glancing across at another student in another corner of the room. So I said, ha! Bingo! Something is going on with these two guys. So I asked the class, "Are you guys aware of anything between these two guys?" They said, "Sir, something is going on." And I asked the class, "Guys, would you talk to both of them?" and they did and they indicated that the source of the conflict was something that happened in a previous classroom and that they had planned to meet to fight at some point in time and when they spoke to them about the consequences of their actions in this school and that they are both ESL and they have to adapt, they kind of cooled down and that was the end of it. Since then I've had no problem with these guys.

A teacher/coordinator spoke, from the perspective of a coordinator of the peer mediation program, tells how he deals with fights.

Well, fighting. I can't remember a specific incident of peer mediation with students who were fighting. So, that's a quite difficult one but
in terms of preparing kids for peer mediation for something like a fight, first of all we had to go through the guidance person first and we had to determine whether this was something legally we should be mediating and I think this is why possibly that issue never came up because I think that issues like fighting we did not handle we allowed the administrators to do that.

The peer mediation program was not fully developed at this school.

Not all schools allow students to mediate students who have been in a fight.

Bonny said that the mediators in her school do not mediate fights. She said

We didn't do that. Once it's physical that's against school rules, and something that the principal has to do. We were not trained to deal with any of the violence or anger kind of thing. I have never dealt with anyone in a physical fight.

In most other schools, that is not the case. At schools E, F, G, H mediation follows suspension. The mediators at School E know how violent some fights can become because they have had numerous fights in their school. Therefore, the mediators are more skilled in this area. They seem to know how to calm their peers before, during and after the mediation process. Marvin realizes the uphill struggle to communicate with disputants but he is prepared to make it work. He shares his perception.

Well, it could be a really sticky conversation all together because when there is a fight they (disputants) are going to be at their peak at badness to each other. They are not going to want to comply with anything, so you have got to be extra careful because you don't want the mediation session turning into a violent blood bath so you have to be extremely cautious again. How you approach that (fight) and violence can turn into a fight. If it is a petty thing like I shove a guy or girl into a locker, someone ran by me and slapped me in the back or punch me in the stomach, big deal. We will mediate something like that and bring the cases out but if it is anything having to do with any kind of weapon as far as I can remember to my knowledge we don't mediate that it goes directly to administration.
The administrator clearly identifies peer mediation as a program for students. For some other educators, peer mediation is more than leadership and problem solvers, it is a part of a re-entry to school after a suspension.

**Re-entry after suspension**

Some administrators promote the use of peer mediation as a re-entry plan after a suspension. One administrator shared his views on why they have a peer mediation program in his school. He said:

> I think it (peer mediation) is more pro-active in terms of preventing conflicts going beyond resolving them before they got to a critical point and also when the students come back to sort of create harmony, put things behind them and then move on. I wish every student that came back had to go through some kind of re-entry process like peer mediation tied in. Generally, if kids are in a situation like a fight and there is a possibility of hostilities recurring we'll sit them down and ask them to talk to one another and come to some kind of a resolution because at some point they do have to meet face to face.

The administrator also explained that students are encouraged to talk about things relating to fights or whatever caused the suspensions. This talk happens during the mediation process.

On the other hand, regardless of the outcry from students and the public about violence in schools, there is still the reluctance on the part of some administrators to admit that violent incidents are happening in their schools and that there is a need for a peer mediation program. One administrator shared that in her school there is a serious problem with stealing, weapons, drugs and gangs, but that the other administrators of the school deny the seriousness of the problem. Despite the police warning about gangs, drugs and weapons in the school, they prefer to believe that they have no problem. Therefore, they do not need a conflict resolution
program in their school. Raun & Leithwood (1993) explain this situation best when they say, “Executives see and hear what they want to see or hear.”

Perhaps conservative principals feel that acknowledging that there are drugs, gangs, and violence problems in their school reflects badly on their leadership and for some affects their promotion to superintendency. When a student in this study remarked, perhaps exaggerating, “there are more guns in this school than textbooks” there is need for the administrators to be concerned. Often students can help but some educators do not buy into the concept of giving power to students. Miller (1994) believes that peer mediation catches on, but some adults don’t. He adds that although high risk students seem to benefit most from mediation training, teachers are often unwilling to give up power and authority to students. During my interviews, I met some of these educators. However, we cannot only blame the teachers. The principal sets the tone of the school and if the principal is resistant to change, the teachers may be as well.

Teachers’ capacity to deal with change, learn from it, and help students learn from it will be critical for the future development of society. They are not now in a position to play this vital role. We need a new mind set to go deeper. (Fullan, 1993, ix)

My conversations and observations with participants during the interviews also revealed that some principals resist change. We can’t mandate what matters, says Fullan (1993). This permits the principals who resist change to continue in their old ways. It is like watering concrete. Gareth Morgan says, “It’s impossible to develop new styles of organization and management while continuing to think in old ways.”

This approach to leadership is not leadership for Tomorrow’s Schools, (Patterson,
1993). It demonstrates leadership that perpetuates Systemic Violence (Epp & Watkinson, 1996). In conversation with some administrators, they see conflicts as only negative and not as an opportunity to create change. For some, change is not necessary in their school therefore they resist any opportunity to acknowledge the need for change. They tell me that there is no need for a peer mediation program in their school because there is no violence. In the schools where peer mediation is not seen in the context of systemic change (Conbere, 1994) the program is given only lip service.

Until people see the task (the above) as a major change effort, they cannot understand the systemic changes required if conflict resolution skills are to be imparted and violence is to be reduced... Adding a peer mediation program and teaching conflict resolution may have little effect if the school itself does not undergo some significant changes.

Some administrators resist changing their strategies of controlling violent incidents in their schools because they believe their current strategies are working and so they believe there is no need to change or use other methods like mediation. So, by not taking a pro-active stand against violent incidents, some may permit and promote violence in schools. This type of leadership is partly responsible for some of the growth of violence in schools today. Detentions, suspensions and expulsions are no longer effective for many of those students who are frequently involved in conflicts. Based on my observations, it is safe to conclude that not many administrators are adhering to Wager's (1992/1993) appeal, “No More Suspensions...” Furthermore, some of the strategies and policies that some administrators are using are not consistent with the policies of the Ministry of
Education around the actions of violent students. Some administrators give lip service to peace in schools. Some wait for violence to happen before they take action. They are not pro-active because they do not realize that reducing violence is not a simple task and a peer mediation program cannot succeed if isolated as an occasional thing students do when convenient (Conbere, 1994). Such action creates fear in the school community.

Some teachers told me that they are fearful of some of the students who cause problems in their classes. One teacher says that she is threatened by a student in her class who repeatedly tells her, “I’ll kill you” because she does not comply with his request to go to the washroom or to leave the classroom whenever he wishes and because she informs his parents of his poor grades. Some teachers say that they are most fearful of those who are known to be charged by the police for the use of weapons in the community and are aggressive in their classes. This statement supports the remark of Judge Zuker (1997), that the students who cause problems in schools are the same ones who cause problems in society (Cited by Roher, 1997, vi). Some principals, they say, turn a blind eye to the genuine fears of teachers. For example, another teacher shared that when she reported to the principal the threats made by a student to kill her, the principal told the teacher that she was over-reacting to what the student said. Therefore, some teachers say that they do not feel supported by some administration. One teacher told me that the principal was upset with her because she reported her fear and when they complain about their working conditions they are looked upon as “trouble makers” and are ignored by some administrators. Again, the hands of some teachers are tied
because the principal sets the tone.

The themes of my observation connect with the literature in a variety of ways. Research studies and papers show that peer mediation can change the school culture (Adami & Norton, 1996; Wheeler, 1994; Jones, 1998; Brown, 1995; New Mexico Centre for Dispute Resolution, 1996). In addition, there are theories that support the value of peer mediation in school situations like those described above. There are peer mediation programs that are stemming conflicts through peer mediation, suppressing gang activities and enforcing dress code and discipline (Adami & Norton, 1996). Some support the effect of peer mediation programs on a school climate. For example, Johnson & Johnson (1996) have done extensive work on Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Programs in Elementary and Secondary Schools. They also report the effectiveness of these programs on mediators, disputants and school climate.

The interviews on “mediation,” reflect support for mediation. Where there are administrators who support the peer mediation program and the goals of mediation there is usually a program in the school community. The success of the program depends on the support given by all members of the school community and where the goals of the peer mediation program are known by all, the support is strongest. In school communities where there is reluctance to admit that inappropriate behaviour is taking place in the school community, little is done to promote a peer mediation program. Some administrators believe that they do not have violence in their school community and so there is no need for the program. I believe that true peace is not merely the absence of tension, it is the presence of justice. Contrary
to the belief of some conservative principals, there is no school community where there are no conflicts.

Roher's (1997, p. 6) comparison between the United States and Canada shows that conflicts are widespread in schools. He states that schools in some parts of the United States are known for their extensive use of interventionist tactics and security measures. He mentioned security measures like guards, uniformed police officers, electronic video surveillance and metal detectors and made reference to the City of Los Angeles where they employ 300 full-time police officers whose sole responsibility is to check students for weapons possession. In the case of Canada, he says that security guards are now a familiar presence at athletic events in Metropolitan Toronto schools and some Ontario school boards are installing video cameras for general surveillance purposes. Except for one school, all schools in the school board where this study was conducted have a security system because violence is on the increase in these Canadian schools. Roher (1997), for instance, identifies bullying, sexual harassment, dating violence, sports violence, gangs and vandalism as types of violence in Canadian schools.

My interpretation of the facts, interviews and observation of the questions asked about mediation also present certain contradictions, development and often support of the literature. For example, contrary to the belief of Miller (1994), expressed in the article, "Peer Mediation Catches on, but Some Adults Don't," it is my belief that most adults would catch on, if they were given peer mediation training. This is evident from the reactions of teachers who are trained in peer mediation. The final report of the School Conflict Management Demonstrated
Project 1990-1993 (p.12) conducted by the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Resolution found that teachers and counsellors at both the elementary and secondary levels benefited personally and had a different perception on peer mediation after their exposure to the peer mediation training. One high school teacher says, “Working with our student mediation program has made the last three years possible for me. I don’t just come in and teach. I work with enthusiastic kids and watch them grow.” The mediation often has a virus effect on others because it can change the behaviour among those who are exposed to it. This seems to be the situation in a middle school in the same study. One middle school teacher said:

I think there has been a change in the adults in the building. They are able to see an alternative way to deal with behaviour problems. Personally, I have gained information and skills. It helped me better deal with kids in the classroom and with my own children at home. Our school conflict management program can be credited with this change.

This new outlook can renew confidence in students and in the process of peer mediation. One high school guidance counsellor had that experience with peer mediation program. She said:

Working with students interested in conflict management has renewed my faith in youngsters. They can really accept responsibility for their behaviour. It’s fun, it really is, to see youngsters growing in front of your face, it’s the beauty of education. In fact, I have employed these skills with my friends.

A parent assistant was also influenced by the exposure to the peer mediation training. The parent assistant says, “I find myself using conflict management skills with other adults. I stop and listen and think. I use it all the time.” All participants in my study believe in peer mediation although they use it at different levels or not at
all. Teachers don't have the time to implement the program while some administrators don't spend the time to research the program. As a result many do not know of its benefits so they do not facilitate its implementation. Only one of the eight schools had a program that was supported by a principal. The seven other principals knew nothing or very little about the peer mediation program and they did not see the need for the program or have the time to educate themselves about it. A few principals are opposed to the implementation of the peer mediation program because they say there is no violence in their school and therefore there is no need for the implementation of the peer mediation program in their school community. Unfortunately, conflicts left unresolved are in every school and they sometimes develop into violence. Principals who believe otherwise are denying the truth. One truth that is not acknowledged is the ability of the peer mediators to accept more leadership roles in their schools. They give meaning and support to the work of Leithwood 's et al (1997) concept of distributive leadership.

Among other things, this research illustrates that the peer mediators are well trained, knowledgeable, and outstanding leaders. Some peer mediators have had more than four years of peer mediation training. However, they seem to be underutilised because in certain schools, the mediators say they have been trained for years but have never mediated, while others have been mediating for four years and more. Nevertheless, their exposure to different cultures in their multicultural school, seemed to have given them the opportunity to use their knowledge and experience of conflict management to handle a variety of issues.

Cultural differences do not affect the peer mediation process. I interviewed
students and staff from every race, culture and racial mix and I did not detect, except for one participant, any possibility of discontent based on the racial/cultural background of the mediator(s). The peer mediators were supported by all participants of the study. That does not mean however, that everyone accepts mediation.

Mediation has many supporters. Blades (1984) cites the Indian Attorney and leader Gandhi as making the universal appeal of mediation apparent when he said:

I had learnt the true practice of law. I had learnt to find out the better side of human nature and to enter men's hearts. I realized that the true function of a lawyer was to write parties riven asunder. The lesson was so indelibly burnt into me that a large part of my time during the twenty years of my practice as a lawyer was occupied in bringing about private compromises of hundreds of cases. I lost nothing thereby- not even money; certainly not my soul.

Gandhi, An Autobiography (p. 59)

Summary

This chapter presents varying perspectives of the goals of peer mediation. It is clear from the interviews that peer mediation has a different meaning for many people. It depends on the individual's involvement with the program. However, most participants describe peer mediation in light of its capacity to restore and maintain peace.

Peer mediation has the support of those who understand the process. Teachers in particular support the peace in and outside of the classroom. In the case of the principals their reactions to the implementation of a peer mediation program in their school when there is no violence, suggest that they are the least informed about the program. In addition, the data gained from the study consistently reveal that some teachers also do not know a lot about mediation or its value to a
school. On the other hand, the administrators (vice principals) who understand the value of the program use it for suspensions and to teach other social values like responsibility and problem solving.
CHAPTER 5

PRE-MEDIATION

Most of the students who were interviewed in this study were the original peer mediators for their school. Their initial training was at the Board Office. The schools identified the students they intended to train to become peer mediators and these students were sent to the Board Office to be trained by experts in the field. First, the experts trained the teachers and the coordinators of the programs and at another session they trained students who in turn trained their peers (see Table 6). The training at the Central Office is considered to be a train-the-trainers’ session.

As one administrator says:

The training program here was involved with teachers training students and the teachers had previously been trained at the board or in other conflict management programs and were therefore passing that on to the students.

The following descriptions of the selection and training of the peer mediators are that of the school-based training five years after the initial training at the board.

_Pre-Mediation_

Pre-mediation is the first step in the peer mediation process (see conceptual framework, Table 2). It describes the work that has to be done before the students can begin to mediate for example the selecting and the training of students to become peer mediators. The students who are selected to be trained are given a very responsible position. Therefore, they have to be selected with care because the success of a program depends on their performance as peer mediators.
Selection of students

This section seeks to reveal how students are selected for peer mediation training. It is important to identify the process used in the selection so I have interviewed administrators, teachers and peer mediators. They have been asked similar but different questions because of their roles in the process.

I chose to speak with each student. Their stories are similar, so I used the selection process from School E to illustrate the steps of the process because it was easier to follow. This process is used only by the administrators/coordinators. Therefore, the role of other administrators and teachers who are not involved with the peer mediation process will be presented. I feel it is also important to get a sense of how students hear about the program in order to see the equity involved with the selection. The findings of the training of peer mediators in eight different schools is also reported. First is the administrators' role in the selection process. A sample selection process, the roles of teachers, support staff and some descriptions from the peer mediators of the selection process in their school are provided. Second is the training of the peer mediators. The training is from the perspectives of the students since it is their experiences that the study aims to investigate. Since the training is different, the voices of the students are presented by each school in order to give the readers a sense of the training in each school. The section ends with a comparison of the findings (Table 7)

Administrators' Role in the Selection of the Peer Mediators.

Some administrators say that they are not involved in either the selection or
the training of the peer mediators. "I have no role whatsoever in the selection or training of the peer mediators. This program is new to me," said one administrator. Another administrator explained that she joined the staff in September and the program had been in place before she got to the school. She also said that it was slow starting because of the teacher's strike. Even the principal of this school may have a limited role in the selection and training. This is what he said:

My role is very limited. Really, nothing in terms of the training and selection of the peer mediators other than through the selection of the individual in-charge of the program. I trust that individual's good judgment.

However, administrators who are coordinators do play an active part in the referral, selection process and in the training of the peer mediators. They are involved in the referrals first. An administrator from School H told me that the referrals come from a variety of sources.

We had staff referrals, we got some students to make some peer referrals, administrators if they knew someone who was interested or we think would be a good candidate, so it comes from a variety of sources, primarily from staff but there are also some students' referrals as well.

The coordinator in this same school shared the process of selection that she uses. She uses email and staff meetings to invite teachers, who recognize strengths in some of their students, to make referrals and recommendations. The teachers also give an explanation of the reason for the recommendations. The coordinator said that students are recommended from grades 9 to OAC and from different genders and different cultures. However, students have to be strongly recommended by at least one or more staff. If the administrator is a coordinator of the program she/he will be responsible for interviewing these candidates. The administrator/coordinator
from School F said that their selection process focuses on the interview and the student’s ability to see both sides of an issue. This is how he described his process of selection:

They (students) are interviewed and the interview process is done first of all in the round and then each specific student is interviewed with regard to how they look at various different sides of the stories and if they can bring to discussion or groups or listening sessions a fair degree of a balanced perspective. In other words they don’t make up their minds before they open the door.

The same administrator further explained that the selection for training comes from both teacher and student nominations.

Most administrators/coordinators told me that they used recommendations from peers, staff and self nominations to select the mediators for the training. For example the selection process at School E has thirteen identifiable steps. They are as follows:

Step 1: An introduction to Peer Mediation for the Administrators. This is to ensure that the administrators of the school understand the mediation process so that they will support it.

Step 2: Presentation at a staff meeting about the Peer Mediation Process. This includes information about peer mediation, the selection and training of students for the program.

Step 3: Announcements to the school community about the program and the implementation. This is followed up with a class visit explaining peer mediation to the students and staff.

Step 4: The students recommend three or more students to whom they turn when they have a problem. This information is sent to the coordinator of the program.

Step 5: A letter is sent to all staff, teaching, non teaching, secretaries, custodians, and cafeteria staff, requesting them to recommend students to be trained for the peer mediation program.
Step 6: All recommendations from students and staff are entered on a data base computer program. All students recommended three to five or more times are selected to be interviewed (depending on the response).

Step 7: Students selected for the interview receive a letter of invitation to an interview with the date and time indicated.

Step 8: The interview. An interview team of teaching and non-teaching staff conducts the interviews.

Step 9: The students are selected. An effort is made to ensure the students reflect the composition of the school community, all grades, ethnic background and abilities.

Step 10: Teachers are given the opportunity to provide feedback on candidates selected.

Step 11: Students are informed of their selection by the coordinator.

Step 12: A letter is sent home to parents/guardians.

Step 13: Staff is given a written update of the peer mediation program to date under the following headings:

Phase 1: Develop a program team and establish commitment to program
Phase 2: Design and Plan the program
Phase 3: Selection Process
Phase 4: Date of training

Teachers' Role in the Selection of Students

Most teachers were even less involved than the administrators. Only one of the six teachers interviewed was involved in the program. The teacher who was involved with the selection and training of the peer mediators in his school described the process in a similar fashion to the administrators. He said:

We sent around a questionnaire to teachers asking them to recommend people (students) that they think would be excellent students in terms of peer mediation and then we gave them some guideline as to what we were looking for and we got pretty good responses and then we sat down and went through these and we interviewed students and
at the time I think we selected twelve students to start with and we kinda build from there.

The teacher/coordinator ended up with a total of 16 students. He said that teachers recommended 15 to 20 students. However, most of the students were selected by those involved with the peer mediation program. In their program students could not nominate their peers, nor was there self nomination as is the case in School E. The same teacher states

We were kind of pro-active and we went around and we looked for students ourselves. Students who were involved in sports. There were some students, actually four students, that we chose who were like leaders in terms of sports and activities. We also did not only look for these students we looked for some students who might have been trouble makers because we thought that we had to have a varied background you see, in terms of our representation. So, that’s a very interesting question.

Other teachers did not recommend students for the peer mediation program. Some did not know that a program exists in their school. One teacher told me that it was not necessary for teachers to recommend students because a vice principal was taking care of the selection of the students. Except for School E, the responsibility to select peer mediators was left on the shoulders of whoever wished to start the program. In those schools it was not really a community effort and they did not have any established criteria.

**Methods of Selecting Peer Mediators**

The schools in this study used three main methods to select peer mediators. One method was that they were hand picked by the coordinators or teachers; a second method was nomination by their peers, teachers or self nomination and the third was by volunteering themselves to be a peer mediator. When they were
nominated by their peers or self-nominated the selection process was formal and interviews became a part of the process. If they were hand-picked or if they volunteered, they may or may not be a part of the interview process. It depended on the school's selection policy.

The peer mediators spoke of a number of different ways by which they were selected to be trained as a peer mediator (Table 3). Their responses range from being in the right place at the right time to being formally interviewed for the position. In the case of Marvin he was at the right place at the right time. He states:

> It was actually funny. I was talking to my counsellor. It was about a problem that came up in my house and she stopped and she looked at me. I was about two to three years younger then and she was just impressed with the way that I actually coped with it and the feedback that I gave her and she said, "wait a minute, Marvin you would be really good as a peer mediator. I said, "Peer mediation what is that?" Then the coordinator of the peer mediation program walked through the door. The counsellor referred me to peer mediation. I showed up there (peer mediation meeting) and from that evening I was at peer mediation. I will always remember that it was a Wednesday.

Bonny joined peer mediation on her own. She said that the opportunity to be a peer mediator, "just fell into my hands." Bonny had been a mediator since grade seven in her elementary school. Nancy, on the other hand, transferred from a school with a program to her current school where there is also a program. In the former school she was selected by her peers. The other peer mediators interviewed were not that fortunate. They actually went through a selection process of some kind. For example Sherry was interviewed. She said:

> When I was in grade 9 I was in the first year batch when peer mediation program ran and what happened was every student in the school was asked to write down the name of the person who fits certain criteria, good listener, good communicator, good speaker and they were to nominate the student. At that time our school was very small. It was about 600 to
800 students. Right now we have 2,400 students. The coordinator and the other people involved took those names into consideration and they asked teachers to also submit certain names of students that they thought would be good in the program. Then they sent a letter out to the students that they picked and I was one of them.

She added that she got an informal interview. She sat with the coordinators and talked about the process. June was in grade 9 when she was referred to the coordinator. She said:

I think, maybe, a teacher or someone must have referred me to the coordinator because one day I was called down (to the office) and I was referred to be a peer mediator. I was interviewed and I was trained to become a peer mediator after that.

Shirley was handpicked. She related how the students before her were selected. They had a more challenging selection process. In her case she was selected by the teacher/advisor. She explained her selection process:

Well, the peer mediation teacher advisor picked you and then you can bring a friend in. You don’t have to be a peer mediator. If you learn the process it’s for you, it’s good enough but if the teacher feels that you are capable and you’re emotionally stable or whatever and you are ready to mediate then they will choose you to mediate.

She also shared how the students two years before her time were selected. They had a more structured selection process. This is what she told me:

Before the coordinator had all students in the school write down three names of people that solved their problems for them. Then they would pick out the names that came out most common. They would interview those people and then chose from there.

Some disputants become converted after their exposure to the peer mediation process. One disputant was very reluctant to speak as a disputant because she feels foolish now that she know how to conduct herself. She is now a mediator and has been very active for the past two years. She says that there is
no turning back to her old ways as a regular disputant. I asked her how she became involved with peer mediation. This is what she said:

I became involved with peer mediation because of my brother. He came and he kept on saying these very interesting things about peer mediation and what they do in there. I asked him, “Is it good?” He said, “Yes, you should come and join” and I did and also the counsellor spoke to me. She told me that I should come and join it because it will be good for me.

The variety of recruiting methods described by the students provided the opportunity for the programs to recruit different cultures, abilities and possibly students who might never have been successful in a formal interview. However, it is the school policy that all students needed to have had equal exposure to the mediation selection process. If not, the program may be seen as serving a special group: the motivated, bright, privileged and the leaders within the school.

The students identified the ways that other students hear about the selection process. Students usually hear about the selection process from their friends, disputants, school administrators, teachers, announcements and posters from their guidance counsellors. Peer mediation is not as appealing, to some students, as some other school activities and so it does not have the same impact on their minds when it is advertised. Marvin explains this point best. He explains:

Well, mediation is not your regular local hockey team association. It is not regular basketball team association. Most kids will hear about it through the school administration whenever a conflict does arise. They hear about it when they are in the office and they are faced with their choices or options what can be done, what can’t be done and mediation is an option. I guess that’s how some get to hear about it. We have school announcements and fellow mediators who relate the message.

In Gina’s school the students hear about the peer mediation process through the
peer mediators' advisers who approached them and ask them to take on certain roles. In Shirley's school, the disputants told their friends about the mediation and the public address (P.A.) announcements informed others about the program and invited them to become involved. She says

Well, the disputants tell their friends they were mediated and how it helped them. They don't tell them what the conflict was but they tell them what mediation was about and then we announce it over the P.A. system about our meeting once in a while. We plan to start advertising.

Bonny says that the peer mediators in her school went around to the classes to tell their peers about the program. They made presentations, showed videos, made posters and even got the guidance counsellors and their teachers involved. This is what they did in her school.

Well, we went around to the classes and we did a little presentation for each of the elementary classes because when I first started to do it was just elementary that we were doing it for because we were just elementary that were trained. So, we went to the classes, we showed a little video tape, we did presentation, we introduced ourselves, things like that. We had boxes in all of the class rooms and in the library for people to put their requests and we checked those and we read announcements and we tried to get their attention and we put posters around the school, just the regular kind of thing, we also had a meeting for the teachers to try and explain to them what it was and try to get them to encourage it, if they know there is a problem to mention it.

Peer mediation programs first started in elementary schools in a less formalized fashion. Some educators believed that peer mediation could not work in secondary schools so the peer mediation program struggled for survival in some secondary schools. Peer mediators are believers of the program and so they used many gimmicks to gain the attention of their peers in secondary schools. The peer mediators in Sherry's school made up a song to publicize mediation. She said:

Well, we did have a mediation song which we played over the announcements which got people really aware of it (peer mediation). They (students) didn't really like the song and they tuned out. We did it over. They played it for a week so people got tired of it. We had posters put up in just about every classroom and the hallways
and we had posters up and a brochure and the referral forms in the guidance office if people want to pick them up.

Apparently the students did not respond very well to the posters. Sherry said, “Most people just walked right by them they see them as another thing on the wall. I don’t know of anybody who actually thought anything of the posters.” Most peer mediators say that they often feel disappointed about the things they do to advertise peer mediation but they kept working at it because they believe in the program.

Nancy’s experience was similar. She said:

Students heard about the program through announcements and there were assemblies. Many people left the assemblies thinking that mediation was a club and not a solution process because I had a lot of people approaching me after the assemblies, and they went over really well, but there were mixed messages and people wanted to join instead of turn to it for resolving their problems.

The peer mediators believe that the assemblies did not provide sufficient information about peer mediation to the students to enable them to understand that peer mediation is not a club but a commitment of service. Nancy described the assemblies as follows:

They (administrators) gathered the students by grade levels, and we had people talk about mediation, say what it was, they went through a brief role play like acting out conflicts that were possible to be solved by mediation, conflicts that weren’t and they had people come back and say we will talk about the mediation process. Still with that, I think, students left there thinking that it was a club and they wanted to join it and they don’t look to it as a solution.

Nancy says that the presentations lasted for an hour. There were time slots for questions and answers as well as further discussions about the peer mediation process in the classroom immediately after the assemblies. Unfortunately the presentation happened once. Nancy said, “The assemblies happened early in the year, there wasn’t really anything to follow-up, during the year and there weren’t any
announcements.” Furthermore, the mediators did not meet regularly.

**TRAINING OF STUDENTS**

This section describes the basic training that the students received at the Board Office in 1996 and explains the current school-based training programs. The programs are different and so they are discussed individually. The section ends with a comparison of the training programs used in the eight schools.

**Board Office Basic Training**

At the initial training session the students were introduced to four main concepts: conflict resolution, mediation, conflict and the mediation process in schools. In the discussion about conflict resolution, the emphasis was on peacemaking, perceptions and communications; the mediation session included the meaning of mediation and the value of mediation to them, their school, their teachers and their parents and the analysis of conflict stressed the nature, origin and the responses to conflict. The students were encouraged to share their experiences with conflicts and in groups they problem-solved the cases that they presented. The final segment was the mediation process. The students were taught six-steps to the mediation process: agree to mediate, get the facts, focus on interest, brainstorm for options, evaluate the options, and to create an agreement. They spent most of the day practising how to mediate by engaging in role plays.

On their return to their schools the coordinators reinforced the strategies that the students were taught at the Board office. These trained students continued their training at their regular peer mediators’ meeting at their individual schools. They trained new recruits once they were competent enough to do so (see Table 6). That
is, they needed to have had at least 15 to 20 hours of training before they were permitted to train others.

**The Training Programs**

The eight schools in this study have four different approaches to training peer mediators. They focused on the peer mediation process, perception, conflict resolution, and the Path program (a peer helper training program). One school combines the Path Program with the peer mediation process. Most schools, however, modelled their training on the One-Day training session that they received at the Board Office. The coordinator of School E says that training at the school level is continual and students experience many hours of training before they begin to mediate the conflicts of their peers. She shared the following:

> Training is continual. We meet weekly. However, an intense and formal training is done at the beginning for all new mediators, and a refresher training is given at the beginning of each school year after the summer holidays and as needed. Students are also kept updated on new strategies in the field. The original training is done by a professional in the field. Other training sessions are conducted by trained personals in conflict resolution who are on staff. Experienced peer mediators also help with the training - those who were trained to train. The hours (of training) are not as important in determining when a peer mediator is ready to train others. What is important is whether or not the mediator is competent, skilled and has the knowledge to impart. Training is not for everyone. All these factors are considered before a mediator is permitted to train others.

This response reflects the thinking of most coordinators of the peer mediation programs. They also seem to have all agreed on the basic number of hours of training that the students need before they are introduced to the school community as mediators. They say that the mediators need a minimum of 10 to 15 hours of training. School E insisted on 15 hours of training as a minimum. School H has a slight slant to their training. They train the peer mediators and the peer helpers
together. The coordinator sees the peer mediation and peer helping training techniques as similar. She said:

We do the training together and this year we will be including the teacher that teaches peer helping because he implements a lot of the same techniques within peer helping credits. The counsellor does the teaching, I do the role playing and the ice breaking activities and this year the peer helping teacher is gonna be jumping in and help coordinate it as well. The counsellor is very organized so she brings her teaching qualities to it. I know a lot of techniques as a Child Care Worker so I do role-playing and ice breakers, so I bring that into it and the other teacher brings the peer helping program into it. It all comes together.

The Peer Helpers program is a credit course and it is a different program from peer mediation. Peer Helpers assist students in a class with their academic work but they do not mediate conflicts. Therefore, the training is different. The only similarity is that in both programs peers are helping peers, but they are helping them in very different areas and ways. Peer helpers are trained to offer academic assistance to their peers; peer mediators are offering communication skills to solve conflicts. The peer mediators at School H complete 12 hours of training in order to qualify as peer mediators. The coordinator explains:

They do 12 hours of training. They have several meetings with us prior to the meeting and one or two after and then the new mediators will do a mediation with the senior mediators at least 2 or 3 times before they go on to do a mediation with someone equally new. So we attach them to seasoned kids.

**TYPES OF TRAINING**

Below is a more detailed account of the peer mediation training for each school in this study. The descriptions will help the readers to compare and contrast programs and to better identify the resources which must be in place in order to have well trained mediators.
Table 6

TRAIN THE TRAINERS TEAM
(BOARD OFFICE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL G</th>
<th>SCHOOL H</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TEAM D</td>
<td>TEAM C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(A) PEER MEDIATORS</td>
<td>(B) COORDINATORS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(C) SUPPORT STAFF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEAM A</td>
<td>TEAM B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCHOOL F</td>
<td>SCHOOL G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the train of the trainers concept. Each trained team of peer mediators trains four untrained students. These students, once sufficiently trained and confident to do so, train another four untrained students until all the students who volunteer to become peer mediators are trained. Other students requesting training in the skills of mediation are also trained by one of the teams.
School E Training: The Mediation Process

School E trains students to fully understand the peer mediation process. The emphasis is on how to mediate. They meet weekly and they spend a lot of time during their meetings doing role plays. The students say that their training is intensive. This is how June feels about the program:

I have received quite a bit of training. I have been in peer mediation since grade 9 which is four years ago and I have been to probably about five seminars and sessions (out of the school). If you want to count all my hours together, I don’t know how much it might be about 200 hours. The training included just the specifics of peer mediation what exactly peer mediation is, the process of peer mediation, the best way to go about handling people in mediation, just all the details that you would need to know to be a peer mediator. It is very important to have the right technique when we are mediating because little things matter (for example) how you appear to the disputants in a mediation.

The students from School E, also told me that they have training sessions on Saturdays once per year in addition to their weekly meetings. This is what Shirley told me:

We have an hour meeting every Wednesday and sometimes there are Saturday training sessions that we go to or other facilitation programs or outside school conferences and other meetings that you go to get trained in conflict resolution and mediation.

The students value their training. Marvin also feels he was trained a lot and by the best mediators in the field of mediation.

The students from School E could not recall the number of training sessions that they had attended because they were so many. Furthermore, the training sessions included training at workshops and at seminars where they also presented. This is how Shirley explains the training that she has received:

I have been to all the meetings after school, I have been to all the Saturday training sessions, I have been to the facilitators program that is going on right now, then I have been to one that we presented, and I have been to other leadership programmes in Conflict Resolution programs, to conferences through school and I have been to the OBIE
At School E all the peer mediators have the same opportunities. Shirley speaks for all peer mediators at that school because their experiences are the same. The only difference between the peer mediators at that school is the number of hours training that they have because of the time when they joined the program. Shirley, for example, has more than 200 hours of training at the time of the interview, Marvin had 40 to 50 hours. In the interview, Marvin made reference to the video tapes that the peer mediators saw during the training sessions at the school level. He said:

I think I have between 40 to 50 hours of training and that differed from practical to video. From the video tapes themselves it gives you a theoretical point of view. Other stuff that we come up across and the ideas that we come up with are the ones that we see happening most frequently in our school and the rumours. It gives you a practical and a mental picture of what to expect, what to do, believe it or not how to sit, how to look at them, how not to look at them, what to say and little stuff like that. Just to remain objective at all times and don’t act like a judge. Just sit back and listen.

The students at School E have weekly meetings which last for an hour. The training sessions that they had outside of the school lasted from a day to five days in some cases. June said:

Each seminar would last about a day. We would go for the whole day so that would be about six hours or so of mediation talking about the mediation process. Other sessions have lasted maybe half day or a few hours.

June is talking specifically about the on-site peer mediation training sessions. This is the continuation of the Board’s training session to keep the students’ skills and knowledge current. Shirley, on the other hand, spoke more to the additional leadership training experiences that the administrators of her school gave to the peer mediators. They attended established leadership conferences where they also
received training on conflict resolution and peer mediation. This is what Shirley told me:

I have been to the OSSSA (Ontario Secondary School Student Association) conference ever since I have been in high school. This is the third one I have been to. They were four days each then the O'Brien one was three days, the presentation was a day. We have also gone to schools and presented there. That's about two or three hours, and the facilitators training that we recently did was two days and a half.

The students have many hours of training varying from 40 hours to 200 hours. It depended on how many of the training sessions that they missed. The average peer mediator at that school had 160 hours of training at the time of the interviews. Having heard the number of hours of training that these peer mediators at School E had, I was curious to hear what they learned.

The students told me that they learned about human nature, people, listening skills, feelings and how to problem solve. The following is a sample of their answers.

June said

I learned that people and human nature are very sensitive and they need to have proper communication because the smallest thing will be able to start a conflict and it is very important to be open to other people and how they're feeling and other things like that. It is important to pay attention to how another person is feeling and get the feelings out basically.

Shirley shared similar experiences. This is how she expressed it:

Well, I learned how to listen. The most important key is listening, being neutral, being able to sit back and not share your feelings, being able to hear other people out and help them ask the right questions so that they can bring about what they have to say.

The students acquired a lot of knowledge at these sessions. I wanted to find out if these sessions were useful.

The students were asked to explain how they apply the knowledge that they
acquired. They had a lot to share. Their answers ranged from using the knowledge to help solve problems with their peers to using the knowledge in their own lives, with their families and friends. Shirley says that she uses the knowledge that she received from the training sessions in her life and in everything that she does. She states:

Ok from experience I guess. I have seen people do it and I use it in my life and everything I do. If there is a fight going on between me and my friends I know exactly what I should do to stop it or make everybody calm down. As a mediator, you learn to walk from conflicts rather than make them worse. You learn to confront them peacefully when everyone is quiet and settled, not rushed and stuff like that.

The ability to walk away from conflicts is an essential quality today because of the increase in youth attacking youth. June also uses the knowledge that she gained from peer mediation training in her own life. She shared how effectively she uses it with her family, especially when she has difficulties communicating with her parents. This is what she says:

I apply this knowledge usually in my own life. I can use it with my friends and in other relationships and within my family I use mediation.

June explained to me that she has an older brother and an older sister. She feels that they need peer mediation training because they could benefit from it because “they tend to think that they are the only ones existing at the time and they think I'm just younger and I don’t know anything. They should realize that I am a lot smarter than they know.” Peer mediation training, June feels, would teach them respect for her. She also explained the difficulties that she is having with her parents and how she applies the skills of her peer mediation training to help her cope. This is what she says:
I use it with my family when I talk to my parents. Say I am having a problem I can say to them, “Ok this is how I feel, I wish you would talk to me like this, I wish things were like this.” So I just get the feelings out and we can really be more open with each other because of mediation.

I asked June about her friends. Her response was similar to Shirley’s. She says:

Well, if I am upset with my friends about something or we are in conflict about something usually we just step back and think about it and take a little while to get through the whole thing and when I’m ready to go back and I say, “Ok, this is how I feel. I feel that I was mistreated like this” and then I explain to them how and ask them how they felt the situation was wrong and then we discuss our feelings and things like that.

Marvin, on the other hand, shared how he used the skills taught at the peer mediation sessions to mediate difficult students. He encountered two students in mediation who would not cooperate with him. He and his mediation partner found the attitude of the disputants challenging. They called on their mediation skills to help them cope. This is Marvin’s account of what happened during the mediation process:

You apply the knowledge in different ways because it depends on the disputants that you actually get (to mediate). It depends on the disputants and the session. Because if you have a disputant in a session who doesn’t want to be there it can be a handful and I have experienced it. I had a session with the counsellor overlooking (monitoring) and there were two young men who just didn’t want to be there. I could see it. One of them definitely didn’t want to be there. Whatever I asked him to paraphrase or to say or confirm what the other guy was saying he completely gave me attitude. You have to learn how to apply patience and diligence and you have got to be on the best behaviour because you can’t have two people coming into you to solve a problem yet you are creating a problem. You have to be extremely cautious of what you are doing or it will blow up in your face.

Students from School E are very well trained and experienced. They are fortunate to have two coordinators who are trained in peer mediation. This is not the case in the other schools. The other schools have far less to share because their experiences are more limited.
School F Training: Perception

School F provides the peer mediators with a different type of training. This consisted of a three day retreat that exposed the students to a variety of other experiences. Sherry is one of the original peer mediators at School F. This is how she described her training:

The first year everything we did was training. We went over different types of communications body language as well as spoken words, different styles of speaking and a lot of role playing activities and before we even got into mediation. We also watched videos. We picked out a conflict or we watched TV. When we had a meeting we discussed a conflict and what was happening and so. We still do that. Right now most of our mediation training that we do is we get together and do practice mediation, dry runs. Role plays, switch back and forth, play mediator or disputants.

School F conducts one big training session each year. All other training is done during the weekly meetings. Sherry is most experienced. This is what she says:

We had one in grade 9, second session of the semester one then meetings per week. All through grade 10 and eleven. The last three years pretty much there has not been one day workshops. It has been ongoing building. Each week we meet for an hour or an hour and a half and so something new or something different. This year there has been no set meeting with the work to rule or whatever.

At School F the yearly training session lasts two to three days. They train away from the school and continue the training during the weekly peer mediation meetings. These meetings last, on the average, for an hour. Students practice role plays and they share their mediation experiences during the meeting. Sherry explains:

Last year our meetings were an hour to an hour and a half where we would do practice mediation as well as discuss and after the mediation we would discuss what the outcome was. Everybody would do the same case and depending on how many groups we have, we don't usually have different outcomes and we discuss them as a group and talk about the differences or similarities.
Sherry could not recall how many hours of training she has but based on the information that she shared indicated a considerable number over five years (since grade 9). She could, however, tell what she learned. Sherry’s training focused on students understanding perspectives. They spent days understanding what it means to see the other person’s point of view and knowing each other. She explains:

What we learned was that there are always two perspectives on everything and there are many ways that you can take the same situation and what it does is it sharpens your skills as a mediator because you switch roles from mediator to disputant you’ve got to look at everything from both sides so you become more aware of what the disputant is feeling as well as you get to just practice. Practice makes perfect. You get to go over everything.

At School F the peer mediation program is seen as an effective program. The coordinator says that the peer mediators are making a difference to the peace in the school. It seems from our conversation that the peer mediators are using the skills that they learn at the training sessions. Sherry explains

I apply my knowledge in every day use. Just the way you talk, the way you listen to people. That’s how I try and do it because if someone is trying to pour out their heart to you and you just sit there going, ah, ah, chances are you are not listening and they are not going to feel satisfied with the way you are listening. So, it’s just the type of communications the way that I try to communicate with other people. That’s what I got from mediation, how to talk to people and how to listen properly.

**School G Training: The Path Program**

Gina said too that her training was based on the Path program but her coordinator described a totally different program. She described a program that focused on the peer mediation process. Gina described the Path program which is usually used to train students to become peer helpers. However, like the coordinator of School H, they believed that certain units in the program taught some peer
mediation skills. Nevertheless, they are two different programs. All the students who were trained originally as peer mediators graduated from the school and the program died because the administrators/advocates for mediation also left the school. Gina did not know much about the peer mediation program although she said that she attended 25 hours of training each of which lasted for 3 hours. When I asked Gina what she learned from the training sessions, Gina said, “The different conflicts that can arise, different people, different situations and how to handle them.” When asked how she applied the knowledge her reply was, “it depends on the situations and how many people I am dealing with.” The new coordinators for the peer mediation program are making a difference to the program and the school community. They have trained thirty students as peer mediators. They used the original program that the trainers at the Board Office used to train the students. That means that the students went on a one-day retreat and were taught peer mediation and conflict resolution skills. However, the focus was on peer mediation and how to mediate conflicts. The students also sharpened their mediation skills by practising role plays. The program is reviving after months of no activity so the advisors did not have very much to share about the organization of the program at the time of the interviews.

School B: Training Based on Conflict Resolution Text.

At School B the students have to complete a course on Conflict Resolution. They follow faithfully a text book and on completion of the text they are declared a peer mediator. Nancy completed the Conflict Resolution course at School B. This is her explanation of the course
I have gone through the whole program, the conflict resolution program. We had a spiral notebook that had all the different things to go through. So we went through that, we would take days. There were a couple workshop days and that's how we did it. I don't remember how many, five different workshop days or something and we went through the books and we had the student services people that worked with us and then the next year and every year we kinda brushed up on it because we had to train the next batch so that's how. I think the book was Conflict Resolution, something like that but it wasn't peer mediation. It was a text.

Nancy revealed a lot about the program in her description above. What was different about her program was the fact that the training started in grade 7 and continued in high school. They use a text on Conflict Resolution for their training. The time commitment was structured because the students had to complete the text in a limited time. Bonny explains the time needed for the training.

I don't think, I think they were the whole day. I am having a hard time remembering because that was when I was in grade 7. We had to take the books home and stuff and when we were training someone else I think it was half a day and I'd go in and work as a helper.

Bonny further explained that the training was done in half days. She said, “It started like in February and it went whatever I think it was one month. Over a long period of time and then we got certified and we got a little sheet that said we have now completed this and now we are peer mediators and things like that.” Bonny said that the students from her grade 7 class all went to her current secondary school. Most were continuing as peer mediators.

Bonny is very excited about peer mediation. She believes that all students should be trained in the skills so that school can become a place of peace. She credits the training for her people skills and stresses the importance of “talk”. She says:

I learned a lot. I learned basically how to deal with people; that was the best thing. It doesn’t have to develop into a conflict, you can talk
through anything and you don't have to just let things go and be angry with someone forever. If you talk through it, you can usually get through it no matter what the problem is but it's really important to do it, talking, because things can get confused and you think you know what happened or whatever in your own mind but a lot of the time it is not the same that the other person thought. So, if you can just sit down with anyone. Maybe, you can do it with your friends, maybe the problem is too big for that but you can at least get it behind you and deal with it.

Bonny is very convinced that talk works. She believes that peer mediation is of great value to her personal growth as well as to others. She stresses how she uses the skills of peer mediation training to become a better person. She said:

While I was doing peer mediation it was mediation for myself. When I have problems you just have to sit down and talk to the person involved. If you let it go it becomes a bigger problem and so I just learned that you must sit down and you must talk. It won't get solved otherwise.

**School L Training: Perception and the Peer Mediation Process**

The previous students received one type of training. Nancy, on the other hand, changed schools and was trained twice. Both training programs had a different focus. One school stresses the peer mediation process while another stresses perception combined with the mediation process. Nancy explained:

I had training at my former school and I had training at my other school. At my former school it was in the form of a retreat and in that training we studied the mediation process but the difference between the latter school and the former school is that the former school focused more on the process while the latter school focused more on how people can perceive things differently. Just looking on the individual and how they would be feeling in different circumstances. It didn't really focus on the process that much. More theoretical.

Nancy had the choice of selecting a school to report on during the interview. She chose School L, her current school. When I asked her about the number of training sessions that she attended she replied:

I had one three-day session and then a follow up occurred every other month or so. So, in total I had one three-day session and say six day sessions.
I was curious to find out what the coordinators did during the three consecutive days. Nancy explains:

The focus was on the theoretical aspects of mediation. Half of the first day we got to know each others’ games (interacting with each other) so we wouldn’t say that the first day was really focusing on mediation but after that we did focus on mediation, the whole concept of it. We were trained by the coordinator.

Nancy did not know how many hours of training she had. In terms of what she learned she said, “We learned the mediation process, perception and how people can be tricked by it (perception).”

Nancy did not get the opportunity to apply the knowledge gained from the peer mediation training to her peers through the program because she did not mediate. However, she claimed that she used the mediation skills in her daily life.

She said:

I don’t apply it to mediation because I haven’t really mediated a session yet, but I apply it to everyday life and I apply it to things that could arise to be conflicts but just because of how I look at things now as to how the person might be thinking or how the person might be feeling and I work with kids at a Day Care and I help them resolve their conflicts with the mediation training that I do have. So, it helps me make younger kids more independent where kid younger tend to look at adults to resolve their conflict so I help them resolve their conflicts for themselves.

Summary

There are three ways that the schools use to select peer mediators. The students are either hand picked, or nominated (by their peers, teachers or self nomination) or they volunteer. The nominated students usually have an interview to help determine their suitability for the program. If they are determined to be suitable they are trained.

There are some remarkable differences between the training programs of the peer mediators (see Table 7). Only three of the eight schools made the peer
mediation process the main focus of their training. Others focused on perception, peer helpers/tutor, a text on peer mediation and another combined the peer mediation process with Peer Helpers/Peer Tutors program. Path Program is a Peer Helpers/Peer Tutors program and the remaining school used a text on peer mediation.

The number of hours devoted to training also varies. It ranges from one hour to a complete semester as is the case with the Path Program. The minimum hours needed to become a peer mediator is also significantly different in the case of the credit course where 110 hours is the normal requirement. Fifteen to twenty hours is the recommended number of hours before a student is declared a peer mediator (National Institute for Dispute Resolution, 1996, p. 14). In addition, some schools have infrequent meetings which are the main source of continuous training and support. Only two schools meet weekly, the other schools meet occasionally or not at all. When the peer mediators meet for training, except for two schools, they are trained by staff who may or may not have peer mediation training.

These findings help to explain the differences in the ability of students to mediate. Nevertheless, the school-based programs are effective because they are helping to prevent many conflicts escalating into violent incidents. On the other hand, these findings also support the need to inform educators about the peer mediation process so that they can facilitate the improvement in the organization and training programs in their school. The table below provides a comparisons of the training programs in the eight schools represented in this study.

The peer mediators learn a variety of skills during the training. Regardless
of their training program they all learn about conflict, communication skills, the mediation process and how to promote peace in their school.

**Table 7**

**COMPARISON OF THE TRAINING PROGRAMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>Training</th>
<th># days</th>
<th>Minimum hrs required</th>
<th>Meetings</th>
<th>School-based Trainer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School B</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution Text</td>
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<td>School E</td>
<td>Peer Mediation process</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>trained teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>School F</td>
<td>Perception</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td>coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School G</td>
<td>Path Program</td>
<td>semester</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School H</td>
<td>Peer Mediation process/Peer Helpers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>as needed</td>
<td>coordinator &amp; teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School M</td>
<td>Peer Mediation process</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>weekly</td>
<td>trained teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>School L</td>
<td>Perception/Peer Mediation process</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>School N</td>
<td>Peer Mediation process</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>occasionally</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 6
REFERRAL AND ORGANIZATION

The referral process generates mediation sessions. Therefore, the peer mediators depend on the coordinator to organize the referral process so that they can get the opportunity to mediate the conflicts of their peers (see Table 2 Conceptual Framework). This section describes the types of conflicts that are sent to mediation and outlines how the process of referral works.

CRITERIA FOR REFERRING CONFLICTS TO PEER MEDIATION

All schools in the study seemed to have similar criteria for referring conflicts to mediation and similar referral processes. Except for one school, only the administrators can make referrals to the mediation process. This means that all referrals from teachers, other staff members and students must be approved for mediation by an administrator before mediation can take place. The administrators and teachers say this method is the safest way to prevent misuse of the peer mediators.

The participants of the study believe that not all conflicts are suitable for mediation. They refer conflicts like verbal agreements and boyfriend/girlfriend conflicts. Mediation is mostly seen as suitable for student/student conflicts but one administrator uses mediation to resolve parent/child conflicts. The participants refer students to peer mediation because they believe that the mediators will encourage the disputants to recognize others’ point of view and to talk out their differences before the dispute escalates into a fully blown conflict. Also some administrators use peer mediation as a re-entry plan after a suspension.
Some participants think that referral to mediation will encourage students to think before they act. They believe that it will also provide an opportunity for students to talk to their peers and clarify issues before and even after a conflict. One administrator who strongly believes in the peer mediation process explains why he refers students to mediation:

Yes, I do (refer students to mediation) because I really think that it teaches thinking strategies: think before you act. It encourages students to mediate among their peers before they get into conflicts. It gives the opportunity to discuss other viewpoints rather than what they are thinking about and what they are hearing from other groups. I guess group dynamics is very important. When you hear from others the approach you should have taken students say, 'Oh Ya, I didn’t even think about that, maybe that was a route I could have taken. I could have come to the office because there was a problem. The office would have helped me get students together before this fight occurred or before this verbal battle occurred or before this swearing occurred.' So, it does help in many ways.

Some administrators use the referral process to bring closure to a suspension. They want the disputants to be civil to each other on their return to school. So as a re-entry plan to school after suspension, they give the disputants the opportunity to talk through their conflict at the mediation session. This creates different files of referrals for some administrators. For example one administrator has two categories of referrals. He said:

Yes, I have referred some students to mediation in the two categories. A couple I have referred after a suspension, actually more than a couple maybe four or five, as part of the package of them coming back or part of the resolution was for them to go through peer mediation and then I have sent probably another three or four just to take the time to talk about their problems with their peers with mediators there. So, I have used it in both ways.

Another administrator says that she refers students to mediation because she wants to save students from suspension. She says, “it will save me time in the future to nip a conflict in the bud.” However, not all administrators refer students to
mediation. Again this is for different reasons. For example, the principal in this study
told me that he does not send students to mediation. Some administrators do not send students to mediation because they do not believe in the process and they prefer to use the traditional method of consequencing students. One administrator said, "Mediation is kid stuff. It cannot really help us to solve the problems that we face daily in our schools," and some staff members say, "mediation is too easy a consequence, it's a cop out of suspension or other consequences." Nevertheless, they all agree on the types of conflicts that are sent to mediation.

All participants of this study seem to agree that they do not send violent incidents to mediation. They are also clear about the types of conflicts that the peer mediators should mediate. For example, on a number of occasions staff members said that the mediation process exists for the students to resolve their conflicts. Teacher/student and teacher/teacher conflicts, in their minds, are not appropriate for students to mediate.

The administrators spoke directly to the issue of student/student conflicts without making any reference to student/teacher conflicts or teacher/teacher conflicts. Although there are more similarities than differences between the responses to the question, it is interesting to hear how different administrators think about the issue. Administrators who are not involved with the peer mediation process, use peer mediation for less severe cases. One administrator says:

I send mainly two types of conflicts to mediation. One is verbal disagreement, a student who feels he/she is being talked about, he/she is being bothered, rumours are being spread about him/her, something that's carried on for a while, so those types of conflicts and the other types are after a fight when the student comes back. It is not in place of a suspension. It really follows a suspension when they come back. It's like a follow-up to the suspension because a
suspension is really a putting out of a fire and then the problem is still there and the students are calmer by then too. There is not as many emotions so after a fight I would send them.

Another administrator who has had some association in another school with the peer mediation process speaks of the varied conflicts that he sends to peer mediation. He includes parent/child conflicts as a specific type that he sends to peer mediation. He says:

I send generally any kind of argumentative issues, relationships boyfriend/girlfriend, fights, racial issues, any issues; even dealing with parents. If there are conflicts between parents we will try and get them in as I said we haven't done as many but just for the parents to sit down with the kids, both sets of parents and hopefully come up with some kind of a resolution.

Other administrators who have no involvement with the peer mediation program tend to send issues that are more directly concerned with only verbal conflicts. One such administrator said, "Maybe verbal or physical hearsay. When a student brings a problem down saying, 'I heard somebody said something about me.' There is no confrontation yet so it may be mediated at that stage too." Another administrator in the same situation explains when he refers students to peer mediation. He says

I would say it's primarily when two students are having a difference, an argument. If it has been a violent act, we normally stay away from that. It's more conflict, disagreement between friends sometimes, or even people they know but they just don't see eye to eye.

The administrators who are coordinators of the peer mediation program refer conflicts that they believe may have a violent outcome if they are not mediated. They are often the common, daily boyfriend/girlfriend problems. The coordinators are also watching those conflicts that need more time to resolve. For example, one administrator says:

I send issues that have the potential to develop into a fully blown conflict. Examples are gossips, girlfriend/boyfriend disagreements and arguments.
Administrator/Coordinator Referrals

The administrators, coordinators and all those involved with the peer mediation program want to resolve conflicts through mediation, but at the same time protect the peer mediators from possible violent incidents. A coordinator who is not an administrator said that she sends to mediation Anything that is loud, aggressive, even threatening, racist, sexist as long as it doesn’t get to a violent point. We don’t put our mediators in a violent situation. If kids have been violent they are dealt with by the administration or by the police.

This coordinator makes it clear that there is a difference between the types of conflicts that the peer mediators deal with and those which are the responsibility of the administrators and those which belong to the police. Some schools are in a situation where incidents that would be dealt with by the police are often settled at the school level, with or without police involvement, instead of the police arresting the students on school property and taking them to the police station. Where the student is sent depends on the experience and confidence of the administrator, the philosophy of the principal and whether or not the peer mediation program at that school level is connected to the justice system. If the peer mediation program is approved by the Crown Attorney and the Superintendent for the area as capable of handling serious problems, then certain cases may be sent to peer mediation rather than to the police or settled with the police at the school. This happens at School E. At that school the peer mediation program is designated as an alternative site for peer mediation by the Crown Attorney. In other schools without this program, the coordinators work independently of the justice system. For example, in the case of an issue of assault, an experienced administrator who is also a coordinator of the
peer mediation program at the school explains what he did. He says:

Last week we had a student and we opted to do the following: they were grade 9, they got into a verbal assault with each other and it was going to escalate into something physical and they were really of the mind that they couldn’t be in the same room together but with the option that we were really gonna do that or we were going to raise the stakes by bringing in both sets of parents. If we had to embarrass them we will, but the idea was that we want it to stop. So, they opted for that, and I think it is still in the progress of going on. So, it is simply first of all of something around the lines of not terribly serious in terms of any physical confrontation and secondly there is a wish on both sides to see that there is some element of value in the process.

The administrator, based on the Code of Student Behaviour and Discipline document, (n.d.) is expected to call the police for all assaults.

Teacher Referrals

Teachers are usually the ones who witness and deal with conflict in their classrooms. They see these conflicts developing and they are the ones who first distinguish between conflicts that they should deal with, and those that should be handled by an administrator and/or mediators. The types of conflicts that they will send to peer mediation depend on their knowledge and experience of the peer mediation process. A teacher who was involved in the peer mediation process in his school had the following to say about the types of conflicts that he sends to peer mediation.

Usually conflicts that arise from say boyfriend/girlfriend issues, problems in the hallways with lockers, people getting into disputes over things like this. There are a lot of petty things that go on in a student’s day and a lot of these things, you know, could be done easily with peer mediation. Sometimes, things like these, could get out of hand. We might think they are petty, but eventually they lead to more serious actions so we felt that when we dealt with them initially we got the two people in, we sat with them. It worked very, very well. Quite often it was just a misunderstanding this person had this perception that this person said something about them and obviously this person reacted to that and it mushroomed from there.
A teacher told me that he did not know what types of conflicts were sent to mediation but he knows what types he would send to mediation. He recalled a problem with a student that he would send to mediation. He said:

Just a few weeks ago there was a problem. A student came to me and said my friend is angry with me and I've tried this and I've tried that and if that student would have come back I would have recommended peer mediation if they hadn't heard about it. But I do often offer that (peer mediation) and some say, "Oh no, no, no, never." But then you do work with them and they’re ready for it.

This teacher works in a school where the principal thinks that there is no need for a peer mediation program because all is going well in the school. Therefore, the program is not supported by him and teachers take their cue from the tone that the principal sets. Another teacher told me that he would send to mediation, “any kid that I can sit and talk with not as a student but as a friend." This teacher believes that the role of the peer mediation program is to prevent, not to cure. Therefore, referral depends on the type of conflict and the stage of the conflict. He explains:

When you use mediation is when anything is out of hand. The goal of the peer mediator is to prevent this from getting there. We don’t want a line to get crossed. So, anything that the parents will not be involved in. Then, you have to get the VP or principal involved. Anything before that. The role of the peer mediator is to prevent not to cure.

A teacher who sees a lot of petty disagreements that she claims has the potential to develop into real conflicts spoke about the types of conflicts that she would send to mediation. This is what she said:

I think I would send girlfriend/boyfriend problems. Some students who tend to be aggressive and a bit among themselves, some show problems and I think these are best sent to mediation.

Now we hear from the students to whom the conflicts are sent.
The students are usually given the conflicts to mediate, but unless a record of conflicts that are mediated is kept on file, it may be difficult to recall the types of conflicts that are mediated. The peer mediators are given the opportunity in this section to share the types of conflicts that they encounter. They say that the scope of conflicts rang from verbal conflicts to physical conflicts.

The students recognize the types of conflicts that are sent to them. They know that they do not mediate dangerous issues and they seem to mediate only student/student issues. Usually they mediate boyfriend/girlfriend conflicts, verbal fights, gossips/rumours, conflicts between friends, racial conflicts (if they are comfortable doing so) and some levels of bullying. Shirley explains the types of conflicts sent to mediation:

Very different types of conflicts. From verbal fights to physical fights but we don’t do any thing (mediate) that would harm us directly. We don’t get drugs, fights involving weapons and gangs. We get physical, verbal fights, something like a misunderstanding to rumours and a fight over preferences, girlfriend, boyfriend, to people who walk down the hall as enemies. Stuff like that.

Nancy explained to me that a majority of the mediators in one of the schools that she attended were in their OAC year. They received about 40 conflicts to mediate. The types of conflicts varied. She said they mediated:

Any conflicts that aren’t illegal in that nobody is being physically threatened, no violence. So, relationship conflicts, conflicts over possessions, material, value, emotional things like best friend leaving for somebody else. That kind of a thing.

The peer mediators appear to understand how to deal with a variety of conflicts. They also seem to have a method of getting to the root causes of some of the conflicts that they mediate. Judy illustrates my point in her response to the types
of conflicts that are sent to mediation. She said:

Usually just verbal conflicts or even physical conflicts too but usually it just stems from different types of conflicts, rumours, or gossips or just girlfriend or boyfriend friendships and everything like that. The whole nine yards.

The students say that they are sent any type of conflict to mediate. However, none have claimed to ever mediate a teacher/student mediation. When I asked the peer mediators about them mediating conflicts involving teachers, this is what Nancy said:

There were student/student or there were one bunch of students against one student or groups, a whole bunch of things but we did them all one on one but I never got a teacher/student one. I don’t even think we made that an option but that’s an idea if a student is having a problem with a teacher.

Student/teacher mediation was unheard of at School B. Marvin, on the other hand, heard about a student/teacher conflict that went to mediation. He explains that the mediation was done by an adult. He said:

We have all types of conflicts that are sent to mediation. It is mostly student/student because you know the most common ones that I have seen are student/student. Throughout my 2 ½ years as a mediator I have only seen once a conflict between a teacher and a student where the student said that she was accused of cheating by the teacher but other than that every other conflict was student/student. The teacher/student conflict was looked over by the counsellor and two other more foundation and established mediators. I was just a trainee, a beginner at that time.

The Peer mediators know these conflicts exist, but that they are not sent to students to mediate. Sherry has never mediated a teacher/student mediation but feels confident to do so. She said, "We have never mediated a teacher/student but if there is such a conflict, yes, we would do a case like that." When I asked her if she would feel confident doing the mediation, she said, "Yes, because it shouldn’t make a difference that it is a teacher, they are just another person."
THE REFERRAL PROCESS

I was curious to find out how the peer mediators get their cases to mediate. My investigation found that the referral structure is hierarchical. As already stated, except for one school, all the referrals are approved by the administrators (see Table 8 Referral Process). Specific questions were asked of the administrators and the peer mediators about the referrals and the record keeping process. The intent was to find out how the referrals were obtained for mediation, if they kept a record of all conflicts within the school; or only of conflicts sent to mediation or was there another system of record keeping.

Except for one administrator, all said that they get their referrals from the teachers and that they do not keep a central record of all the conflicts that happen in the school. The exception was the administrator who gets referrals from staff and students. She said, "I get referrals from staff and students. I have a record of only the conflicts brought to my attention." This administrator is the coordinator of the peer mediation program at school E. She says that the mediation program is not accepted or supported by all staff and to get a record of all conflicts that occur within the school would be difficult. She explained the situation:

The mediation program is not accepted/supported by all staff. Some still believe that suspension is the answer, some don't want to give away their power over the students, some feel mediation is too easy on the students. It's the difference of philosophy of the program and of what we are about as a school that is in the way. They like it as it is here. Maintaining the status quo is the goal. Mediation will change what others might not like changed, so it is safer to not openly support it.

A coordinator who is not an administrator has a similar but slightly different referral and accounting system for the peer mediation cases. Referrals in this school,
Table 8

PEER MEDIATION REFERRAL PROCESS

CONFLICT DISCOVERED BY: TEACHERS CYW'S ETC.

ADMINISTRATORS

OPTION 1
PEER MEDIATION (STAFF ADVISOR)

OPTION 2
SUSPENSION

OPTION 3

OR
TRADITIONAL CONSEQUENCES (CODE OF CONDUCT)

OR
OUTSIDE AGENCIES (YOUTH SERVICES, POLICE)

OR
SUSPENSION (ON RETURN TO SCHOOL)

SUCCESSFUL
UNSUCCESSFUL

AGREEMENT SIGNED

The illustration above explains the peer mediation referral process. The conflict goes first to the administrator. Students can agree to go to mediation or be suspended (options). If mediation fails the students go back to the administrator. If the students refuse mediation they also go back to the administrator. In both cases a suspension is most often given as an alternative (traditional) consequence. If mediation is successful, an agreement is signed.
School H, are received from any adult in the school community and there is a record of all the conflicts that occur in the school. This is what she told me:

We keep it (records of conflicts) in a file. We have two files. We have a file "mediation completed" and "pending follow-up" which is done weekly by the mediators, and once the follow-up is done, if everything is good it goes into another file where it is just kept permanently unless the kid ever gets mediation again. If at the follow-up mediation contract has been broken it goes to mediation one more time and they (disputants) are given the opportunity to clean it (conflict) up and from there it goes to administration. If it is not workable it goes back into the pending for another week and then we see after the week if it is going better. Sometimes we have to adjust the contract a bit. We only have a record of conflicts mediated not all conflicts in the school.

The peer mediators understand that the conflicts that they mediate are the ones approved by an administrator. In their discussion with me about how they get the cases to mediate, the students talked about the process of referral starting with the discovery of the conflict, the role of the administrator and the choices that the students make about their conflict that takes them to mediation. Marvin explained the process. He said:

The cases are first discovered; then sent to the office to the vice principals. I guess they basically give them (the disputants) their options and it is based upon them (disputants) whether or not they agree or disagree to come to mediation. It takes its own toll from there. If they disagree, they get suspended if they agree they come and share their thoughts.

Shirley and Marvin are from the same school. She confirms and further explains the referral process from the perspective of a peer mediator. She said:

Well the cases go to the vice principals’ office and they will tell our student advisors. The vice principals give the students the option of mediation or suspension or the other consequences and depending on what the student chooses. If the student choose mediation then one of the mediation people will be called and they would be told about the mediation and the mediation supervisors would pick out the appropriate student to mediate their problem.
Most mediators explained that the conflicts would be sent to a vice principal who would refer the conflicts to the advisors of the peer mediators. When asked about referral from teachers, Nancy said:

Teachers suggested it but they couldn’t go straight to mediation they had to go through the vice principals first.

Not all programs permit students to refer someone or themselves to mediation. The findings of this study show that most referrals had to go through the normal process starting with the vice principal. However, Nancy is aware of students’ referrals in one of the schools where she was a peer mediator. She said:

Not that I am aware of (student referrals at School M). I know that it happened a few times in my former high school but I don’t know if the cases were ever mediated.

The referrals are passed on to the peer mediators in different ways. Gina got the cases to mediate by just talking with other students while June spoke about being selected as the best person to mediate a case. In June’s case this is what happened:

The guidance counsellor finds that I would be best suited for the conflict and the right age and that I would be best suited for the people in the conflict then she will assign me to that conflict.

In Sherry’s school, the coordinator decides who will mediate a conflict based on their experiences and who is best able to mediate that type of conflict. Sherry explains, she said:

The coordinator just passes them down. She sees who did the last one and knows what a person’s particular strength is. A lot of it now is based on availability and how fast you can be there and if you have a person that you work very well with then those two will work together otherwise anyone else who has been trained and can do it.

The referral system at School B is totally different from those discussed above. It’s
accessible to everyone. Referrals are accepted in boxes left in the classrooms and in the school library. Bonny explains how it works in the classrooms

We had them (boxes for referrals) in the classrooms. You had to fill them out and you had to agree with the others. Some of the teachers would tell them maybe that is what they should do, but you never force, they had to agree, both sides and sometimes if the opposite problem wasn’t violent they would send them our way, but usually it would be people that they would want to do it so they would fill out the form.

This process is open to all students in the school and all students have the same opportunity to get their conflicts mediated. Since the administrators are the ones who send students to mediation the inquiry about the stage that a conflict reaches before it is sent to mediation was addressed to the administrators.

**STAGES OF REFERRAL TO MEDIATION**

Students who are in conflict are usually sent to mediation at specific stages of the conflict. For instance, most referral to mediation would happen before the conflict develops into a fully blown conflict or after the conflict has escalated. Sometimes, in the later case, the students are usually returning from a suspension because of a fight. Some administrators have clearly defined stages when they refer students to mediation.

Administrators refer students to mediation at varying stages. They describe an early stage, a two-stage process, a three-stage process, as well as a situation when students are sent at all stages of the conflict. The administrator who spoke of the early stage also sends students at different stages of their conflict. This is what he says:

Generally, I would like to get it at the early stage. If I see a conflict happening and it could be resolved earlier on I would like to do it then but it is never too late for mediation and in some cases mediation may not be the solution but I always think that if there is a
possibility of hostility when they do come I like to make sure that they return to school putting their differences aside and maybe agreeing not to talk to one another. That in itself may be a solution.

He also spoke about cases that are not suitable for mediation. Those he resolves.

What are the differences in these cases? He explains the situation as follows:

Okay, there is a police investigation going on, and we don't want to tamper with that because they are dealing with it. Sometimes the two kids just don't want to talk to each other and we respect that. Maybe at a later date we give them the option of coming back but generally in cases like that they tend not to. It may be a relationship girlfriend/boyfriend that has gone sour and they would rather not, two individuals have a long history of a dislike because of relations, so general situations like where personally or one of the mediators feel it is not gonna be a winning situation for anyone then it is in the best interest, hopefully, not to do anything but we will mention it then that it is available if they should ever need it.

The administrator who identified two stages also acknowledges the importance of getting to the conflict at the initial stage. That for him, is stage one. He explains:

We do it in two stages. One, we may peer mediate before the fight occurs, when the dispute is in the first stage: he says, she says, or a student brings it (conflict) down. That's the very initial stage. Very often it is very successful at that stage and it doesn't escalate into a physical conflict. But also it could be initiated after the fight to ensure that the fight does not occur again, to ensure that the information you are getting is correct and that we hear both sides of the problem so that it doesn't happen again. So, we do it in two stages before and after the conflict and it has been successful in both stages.

The administrator who has three stages for the referral of conflicts to mediation was specific about the types of conflicts that would necessitate each stage. His process is as follows:

Well at the beginning and end stage. At the beginning if I find that there is some unrest, there is gossip, there may be a fight where there is disagreement between students so it would be at the beginning of what could be a conflict and at the stage where conflict has taken place, a fight has taken place, an argument has started, there is conflict already, I would send them to resolve that and thirdly, after a suspension. So, really there are three stages.

One administrator spoke in terms of giving the mediators experience in resolving conflicts. He said
If it looks like, I guess you gain this insight from experience, like something that would be a good opportunity for the mediators to experience to see if they can work through it and also if it is not to the point where it is not too severe where it looks that there may be further violence or it may get out of hand.

Requests for peer mediation can be submitted formally or informally. A formal request is the completion of an application form by the individual(s) who has/have direct involvement with the conflict while an informal submission is by word of mouth through an administrator. In the latter case, the administrator refers the conflict directly to mediation. One administrator says, “(When informal) referrals come through me I tell the two individuals (peer mediators) that we have a couple of kids to be mediated, and to go on with it.” Not all administrators followed this practice but those who do pass on the conflicts to mediation. For instance, an administrator/coordinator who works with administrators who do not fully believe in the program said that he passes on the conflicts that are informally presented on their behalf.

The referrals come personally from me. I usually deal with situations as they come to me in my part of the alphabet. I have encouraged the other 2 administrators to do it and they started to do it. At one time they were very limited but it seems they are getting more and more involved. There has been some situations when teachers have made referrals and said this is a conflict that’s brewing, we think mediation is a good thing and I would call the two individuals and say, this is a situation that may explode at any time.

Teachers also pass on the informal request for mediation through an administrator. When the administrators were asked why teachers are not allowed to make referrals directly to the coordinators they said that teachers might pass on too many problems to mediation some of which might be theirs (teachers) to solve. The principal explains how informal referrals are made. He said
Referrals are usually made through either the vice principal or through a teacher who observes the conflict in the classroom or through student referrals themselves as they admit to either a counsellor, or to a CYW (Child and Youth Worker) or to someone in that position that they are involved in some kind of a conflict with another student or a group of students and they ask for help in getting it resolved.

Other informal requests are made through students usually of things that happen in a classroom. An administrator speaks of one such referral that may be made to the vice principal by either the student or the teacher. This is what the administrator says:

The referral may be made by the vice principal because of an incident that happened in class and it came through a student, it may be made by a teacher. A problem may come to the vice principals' office by a teacher in the early stage of the conflict, it may come from other students who witnessed an incident or it may come from the students themselves who were involved in the conflict.

Most schools involved in the study make their referrals by filling in a formal application form requesting mediation (see appendix J). One administrator explains the process:

When an administrator makes a referral there is a form that they have in guidance that we fill in which ask the name of the student and what they want mediated and basically that's it. Then they look up their time table and they call them. So, a form is used and it's by referral. I know that administrators use it as referral and I think guidance counsellors use it too. I'm not sure how much the teachers would use it. I think if they use it at all they would give the students' names to guidance and then they would take it over from there.

Two other administrators describe the use of the forms and their process. One says, "They tell me first and the forms come after usually. There are too many activities here to get into the paper work in the beginning." This administrator is in a very large school of almost 3,000 students. The other administrator says, "There is a referral form to complete or they can tell me or another staff advisor of the program." In another school, both the forms and verbal requests are acceptable. One
administrator explains

There is a form but sometimes it can be done verbally to the staff liaison who will then meet with the peer mediators and explain the situation to them and ask them if they feel it would be an appropriate scenario, we can just give them the form, but usually it's a verbal discussion between the referring staff, which is usually administration, it's sometimes the guidance counsellor, but we speak to the staff liaison who then speaks to the peer mediators. We also speak to the students that are involved in the conflicts as well and make sure that they are interested and willing to participate as well.

This administrator tells me that the primary sources of referrals are the guidance department, administration and “we get some from the actual staff that has been part of the staff from the beginning as staff liaisons. However, we find that we do not get a lot from this source (teachers).” Except for one teacher, the others said that they have no idea how to make referral to the mediation process. Teachers responses were either that they do not know, or “I have no idea” or they guess the referral is made to the vice principal or that, as one teacher said, “I usually send people to the vice principal. I have to be honest about that.” The only informed teacher said:

Usually, if there are problems that come to the office, the guidance teacher would liaison with the VP and if they thought that the conflict was something that we could handle this is how it was referred to us.

The above teacher is a coordinator of the peer mediation program in his school.

The coordinator in the study, who is not an administrator, seems to have a way to get the students to make referrals when they have a problem. She said

Yes, the students can refer themselves. Often if a boy or girl is angry with someone and feels they are about to lose it they will come to one of us (coordinators) in guidance and say, “I’m really angry with this person and I don’t know how to deal with it but I don’t want to go back out there because there is gonna be a fight. We then offer them mediation. They will write up their own request.

So in this case the students referred themselves to mediation and submitted their
own request forms. The disputants were also interviewed. They said that their referrals were in the form of a note from a teacher which they gave to the coordinator. Another disputant from the same school, School E, says that he was not asked if he wanted mediation. He was just sent to mediation. He could not explain why, so the administrators were asked who sends conflicts to mediation. Again the administrators made it clear that they make the final decision about what issues will go to mediation. Teachers are merely giving their input, but the administrators have the ultimate responsibility. One administrator made this very clear when he said, “We do all the screening.” In addition he says:

Basically they (conflicts) get referred. A teacher may refer an incident to the office and on the way of getting to the office there may be a discussion of the possibilities of alternate ways of dealing with it and I think teachers do some referral in that way but there is no mediation that goes on further than that unless it goes to the office first. We do all the screening.

In School E the coordinator says that conflicts are sent to mediation by, “all members of staff and students who recognize that they need help with a conflict involving a peer or a teacher.” However, based on the information that they shared, what really happens is that conflicts are screened at the office by the administrators, usually a vice principal in the fashion as stated above by the administrator.

The coordinator who is not an administrator speaks of another approach to the referral of conflicts. She says that anyone involved with the conflict can refer the conflict. This is what she says:

Usually, whoever intervenes - it could be a teacher that intervenes in a classroom dispute, it could be an administrator called in because there is a screaming match going on in the forum. Whichever adult intervenes has the right to bring the kids, sits them down and say, “okay you have two ways to go. We can give you a room and you can talk about this with the help of mediators or you can go to the VPs office now. What do you want?” The kids usually choose mediation.
Repeatedly the teachers say that they do not know who refers students to mediation. Once again the discussion centred around why teachers who are on the front-line of the conflicts are not allowed to refer students to mediation. They are the ones who see the conflicts first. The explanation comes, this time from a teacher who is also a coordinator of the peer mediation program in his school. He explains:

Well we didn’t want teachers referring people to peer mediation because we could see whereby we would be swamped potentially, so we allowed it to go through the formal root, through the administration and then back to us.

On the other hand, a disputant says that he was referred to mediation by the principal. That goes to show that each school has its own model of referral. In the end what really matters is what works best to serve the needs of the students, staff and school community. Even with the most successful referral process there will be disputants who will go to mediation because they are avoiding a suspension but when they get to the mediation stage they may refuse to cooperate with the mediators. We turn to the mediators to find out what happens then.

**Uncooperative Students**

Most mediators know what they should do when a disputant refuses to cooperate. First, they remind the disputants of the ground rules and that mediation is voluntary. They also jog the memory of the disputants by telling them that they chose mediation. The mediators say that they stop the mediation when the disputants do not cooperate. Their strategies for handling the situation is interesting. June makes her position very clear to the disputants at the beginning of the mediation. That, she says, sets the tone for the mediation and justifies her actions
when things do not go as expected. This is what she does

At the beginning of the mediation we tell them that mediation is completely their decision and if they refuse to cooperate anytime during the mediation then we will completely stop and say, “okay, if you don’t want to be here then you don’t have to be here. It’s your decision to be here and actually it is a privilege for you to be here so if you are not going to cooperate we are just going to send you right back to the principal’s office and you will have to deal with the consequences.”

Shirley has the same message for the disputants who refuses to cooperate during the mediation. She tells them:

Then we have to break up (stop) the mediation or we ask them, “You have volunteered to come here and if you don’t want to cooperate then you will just have to go back to your VP and face the traditional consequences. We don’t push them into being mediated.

Sherry also reminds the disputants that mediation is voluntary. She asks them for a reason why they don’t want to be there, if that’s the case, and she uses that as a justification to end the mediation process. She explains the following:

Before they come to mediation they have to agree because that is the way we run it. It is totally voluntary if they don’t want to be there. They don’t have to be there. Just give us a good reason why. If they are being totally uncooperative we go over the ground rules again which includes this is a voluntary process you don’t have to be here, just give us a good reason and you can leave. If they refuse to cooperate then we have to close down the mediation and when we sign the contract state that disputant A could not cooperate, did not want to be there, conflict unresolved.

Bonny said that in her school any form of uncooperative behaviour means that the mediation will not even start. She says, “We don’t do it then. They don’t have to agree.” Nancy’s experience explains the alternative that the disputants may have at their disposal.

I know of one specific situation in my former school. There was a physical fight between two students and one of the students was willing to go to mediation, the other wasn’t and as a result they were both suspended. At my current school, I believe the same thing happened but the student that was willing to participate wasn’t suspended and the student who didn’t want to participate was suspended which I feel is the fair thing.
In her school students returning from suspension due to a fight do not go to mediation. Another situation, for the administrators and the mediators, is when the students choose not to use mediation. Knowing that mediation is voluntary what will the administrators do? The questions were posed to the administrators and the teachers.

**When Mediation is Refused**

Students are encouraged by their teachers, counsellor, and administration to use the services provided by the peer mediators. However, some students may choose not to use the service and that is their choice. In that case, the consequence that replaces mediation might be more challenging to the disputants. If students request mediation the administration will set it up for them but if they choose not to go to mediation other consequences are given. When mediation is refused or is unable to solve the problem a suspension may be given. One administrator explains the process. She says:

If a student chooses mediation, we select the mediators to do the mediation. If the student chooses not to use mediation then we return the conflict to the administrator responsible for that student. The traditional consequence is applied to the conflict. It might be detention, suspension, in-school withdrawal or whatever the administrator feels fits the problem. The options are as stated earlier. Parental contact might also be an option. Depending on the problem, the police could be an option in the situation of a serious fight. These options are necessary to teach students that certain types of behaviour are not permitted in school and to make students involved accountable for their behaviour.

Administrators approach these alternative decisions in varied ways. Some counsel the students into going to mediation because of the importance of talk and of putting a closure to the conflict. One administrator points out to the students how they can lose their decision making power by not choosing mediation. That means, he said, that the students are allowing a decision to be imposed on them by the
administration. He wants the students to take ownership for decisions made about their lives. He says:

Well, we don’t force them. We encourage them. If they chose it, it is an opportunity, again, they are fearful of the repercussion that may be coming from the administrator involved so they see it as a window of opportunity to work through this on their own and be a part of any consequence or any agreement that they can come to that’s not handed down to them from the administration. The options are the consequences that will be delivered to them or determined by the administrator or whatever staff is involved. So, the option is, “do you want us to make the decision or would you rather be part of the decision and hear the ideas and perspectives from your peers?”

The principal confirmed the policy as described by the vice principals. He also speaks in terms of mediation or suspension. This is what he says:

If a student chooses not to participate in mediation then the student chooses the alternative which is an administrator’s consequence usually results in some form of discipline leading up to and including suspension. If they do choose mediation then usually the situation can be resolves and completed among the partners and the consequences are pretty limited. So, it’s really if they chose not to go through mediation that additional consequences would be imposed.

One administrator says that she does the mediation herself if the student prefers that as opposed to going to peer mediation. Other administrators usually assign a suspension to the students when they refuse mediation. In all cases, a valid reason must be given by the disputants for rejecting mediation. In one case an administrator says that once the disputants choose mediation they are expected to follow it through or they will be suspended. He explains:

Well the options are very clear before they start. If they involve themselves in mediation then they are following it through and if they opt out of it part way through they will likely evoke another consequence out of the situation which will likely be more punitive possibly involving suspension from the school.

One administrator includes going home to cool off as an option to mediation. He also mentions suspension, withdrawal from classes as possible options. Another
administrator says he uses mediation as a carrot. He explains:

Generally if they (disputants) use mediation there is usually a carrot.
If there was a suspension, I would say for five days would be reduced to
a day or two days with an in-school added on or the suspension would
be foregone if they would proceed with mediation. So there is some kind
of coasting done but generally it would be to their benefit if they go
through with it. If they say no, well I don't have to live with the punishment
that's given by the school. Whatever, according to the code of conduct is
what they get.

An administrator talks of counselling the disputants first about their choices and their
decision before considering a suspension. When all fails, she might do the
mediation herself. This is her perception of the situation:

Well, if they don't choose to talk and they haven't broken the school
rules, there isn't a fight yet. Then I can't make them talk but they are
made aware that should something happen, the consequence will be
worse for them so it is to their advantage to talk and usually, when
students have a problem they do like to talk about it because they do
not want to have a problem that they are uncomfortable with too and
they like to be able to know how the other person feels and having it
in an office or with mediators at least they listen to each other, they
won't shut each other out.

Inquires were made about students breaking a rule and what would happen. The
administrator says that it depends on the rule that is broken. She says, "Well, it
depends on what it is. Suspension; I will probably use that a couple of times too. I'd
say to them, 'We have a choice. If you are that upset at each other I can suspend
you, or you can try resolving it by mediation.'" Every student, she says, has chosen
mediation rather than being suspended. After suspension she sends students to
mediation. So far, she has not had anyone refusing to go to mediation after a
suspension. Her experiences are as follows:

So far, the students that have gone to mediation after they have been
suspended haven't refused to go. Probably because by the time they
come back they are calmer, they don't have the same emotions, they
know when they are back that is what they need to do to go back into
the classroom and so they aren't refusing it. If there is a problem that
is brewing that I know about and the student says, "No, I don't want to
go there. I have been through this before and I still have the problem."
I have had some students say that to me, then in a sense I try to resolve or negotiate or mediate myself. I’d call the second student down and I’d do it right in my office and I’ll let the two students talk it out and sometimes we’d call a third, a fourth, fifth. At one time, I had five or six and I even found a room for them to talk it through until they could resolve it so that was in place, over the rule that we call peer mediation but it was really a very similar concept: give them a chance to talk it through.

The administrators say that the students in conflict should always have a voice in the decision to go to mediation. Another approach to encourage peer mediation comes from an administrator who wants the students to take ownership for decisions made about their lives. He says:

Well, we don’t force them. We encourage them. If they chose it, it is an opportunity, again, they are fearful of the repercussion that may be coming from the administrator involved so they see it as a window of opportunity to work through this on their own and be a part of any consequence or any agreement that they can come to that’s not handed down to them from the administration. The options are the consequences that will be delivered to them or determined by the administrator or whatever staff is involved. So, the option is, “Do you want us to make the decision and hear the ideas and perspectives from your peers?”

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Most teachers are not aware of the choices that students make about mediation. Their answers varied in response to the question, “What happens if a students does or doesn’t choose to use mediation?” One teacher says, “It’s beyond the peer mediator. It belongs to the office.” That was the general feeling. Teachers say either, “Well, then they would be back to administration” or “I really don’t know.”
The coordinator who is not an administrator also says. “Send them to the administrator.” The final question was about actions taken to avoid a recurrence of a conflict.

Summary

Mediation provides an opportunity for students to listen to their peers so that a fully blown conflict can be avoided. There are three options to the referral of a conflict. Option one is peer mediation; option two is suspension followed by peer mediation; and option three is the traditional methods of consequences. That means that the administrators follow the instructions of the Code of Student Behaviour and Conduct and give the student(s) the designated consequence for the infraction. In the latter case, the Youth services and/or the police may be involved. Mediation may fail, and in those cases, the conflict is returned to the administrator who usually gives a traditional consequence. Students who refuse mediation are sent to an administrator and they may be assigned a traditional consequence. Since mediation is voluntary, students have an input into the type of consequence assigned to them.

Only certain types of conflicts are sent to mediation because some are not suitable for mediation. Referral of conflicts are made by all members of the school community. However, not all conflicts get to mediation because an administrator must approve the referrals and these referrals sent to mediation are always those not involving any danger to students. The referrals may be formally or informally made by completing a request form or requested verbally respectively. Referrals are made to mediation because of a variety of reasons. For example, some believe that referrals encourages thinking, brings a closure to
a suspension or even prevent suspension. Most conflicts are relationship issues that are the results of a break down in communication.
CHAPTER 7
THE PEER MEDIATION PROCESS

The Peer mediators aim to give the disputants a voice, get their feelings out, narrow the issues, encourage honesty and resolve conflicts peacefully. This section illustrates how they accomplish these intentions through the peer mediation process. The information shared covers three main areas. First, is the types of conflicts that occurs in schools; second are illustrations of how students mediate conflicts; and the final session explains the conflicts that are not resolved by mediation.

Types of Conflicts

During the interviews, the participants made reference to different types of conflicts. Rumours are one common type that most schools experience. Marvin knows about rumours. He says

Rumours are the most popular ones(conflicts). Rumours are the most basic problems because people act on what they hear and they don’t get the facts. People constantly hear rumours that you said that you said that, and the rumours continue.

Marvin was asked how he would respond as a mediator if he was faced with that conflict. He repeated the words, “conflict” and “rumour,” reflected and then said

Conflict, rumours. There is a meaning behind the word rumour. You have to confront the person face to face. You don’t hide your feelings, you make them know how you feel. You ask them to get the facts out. You can’t hide your feelings. If you hide your feelings you are going to have a problem because what you want to hear is not what you are going to hear if you don’t ask the right questions and be straight forward.

The peer mediators look at different aspects of the conflict, try to get the disputants to speak freely, expressing their feels and narrowing down the conflict. Bonny has
a lot of experience as a mediator. She has been a mediator since her elementary
days and she also says that, rumours are the most frequent cause of conflicts.

Bonny shares her experiences as follows:

Conflict. When I was doing mediation (before the teachers’ strike)
the main one was rumours. Lots of girls and they are all problems
because someone had said something or they thought someone had
said something and that was the main problem and usually when you
got the girls in (mediation), it was pretty difficult to do rationally
because they kept referring to different people. “This person told me”
and usually you have two people so you don’t know really’ you just try
start narrowing it down to exactly what happened not with other people outside
but between the two of them and usually it didn’t happen what they though
happened or if it had happened they were sorry for something they said because
they were angry or whatever. So this was the main conflict.

I asked how she would respond to the conflicts that she described and she had a
detailed explanation. In her response she speaks about honesty.

You really have to narrow it down. You have to let them speak.
The big problem is not letting the other person talk. You have to
say. “No, it’s not your turn. You will get your turn. No, no, no,
that’s not how it happened, that’s not true or this person said this.
You have to try to get it all out because usually they don’t know
what the other person has heard so it’s really good to let them
hear what has been told because after that they can just go,
“No, I didn’t say that” or “I meant it in another way” or whatever.
So, really it’s not really you mediating but just giving them a
setting where they can talk it out. Usually, it’s not even you. If
you just let two people who still want to be friends or want to
resolve this they can do most of it themselves if they just get the
honesty out there. Usually, when people have fights in high
school they just try to avoid the other person so the best thing
in mediation is getting them sitting down, at least in the same
room. And talking out their problems. Just let them talk really.

A coordinator explained how rumours can take many forms and can complicate the
conflict. She says that it sometimes depends on the grade of the students. The
example that she cites illustrates how a “look” resulting from a rumour created a
conflict.

Conflict is always based on, she looked at me wrong or she
dumped me in the hall and I think she meant to fight me or
drove too fast and almost hit my car in the parking lot and the
first one wasn’t aware that it happened. When we get down to
the facts it is very rarely racism but most of the time it’s rumours or boyfriend/girlfriend stuff.

The coordinator also says that in grade 9, females get into conflicts more than males and the conflicts are always over a boy or rumours. This statement connects to the research of Finley (1997) entitled, “He Said/She Said.” Another administrator who has similar experiences with rumours explained the types of conflicts in his school community in the following ways:

Verbal, or hearsay, negative comments, possibility of racial slurs.

In my view, I think a lot of the problem is perception of what people either thought they heard somebody, a friend of a friend of a friend thought they heard someone say. By the time the eighth person hears the information, a broken pencil becomes Bosnia very quickly.

June told me that a common example of a conflict would be “two friends, one of them gossips about the other one, or it all comes from rumours or it could be a problem with whose locker is it, problems like those little petty things.” They are petty to June because she is a senior student but they might be big issues to junior students. June’s response to the way that she would handle the conflict was equally mature. She says

OK. I would say, how important are these things to your friendship? I would say that they should not gossip and say little things about each other because that is just being immature.

A second common example of a conflict that the mediators cited is relationship conflict which develops between friends. They say these conflicts usually develop from misunderstandings. Gina’s example of a conflict is “two friends who are not on speaking terms, who can’t come to an understanding as to why.” She says, “I would get both sides of the story and see when the problem began and see if I can get the two sides together and encourage them to solve the problem.” Gina is the
least experienced of all the mediators in the study so her problem and solution are
less complicated compared to those encountered by Sherry. This is Sherry’s report:

The last mediation that I did was a student/student bullying, harassment; there was even a death threat. So conflicts can be verbal, nonverbal as in physical fights or whatever, and they could be just people looking at each other the wrong way. It's just basically a clash of opinions.

Apparently Sherry was allowed to mediate potentially dangerous conflict. I asked her again. “The fact that there was a threat were you still allowed to mediate it?”. She said:

Yes, neither of the two students wanted to be suspended because in my school that is how it works. Mediation is an option instead of a one or two day suspension and our coordinators and the principal and the vice principal were also aware of the problem. They had understood about the fact that the police were involved but they decided to give us a shot because for the student that was being bullied she was not getting any closure. The administration had been in to say, ‘leave this girl alone’ but she was not getting any closure. The mediation had one purpose which was to provide closure so that she could feel safe in her own school.

I asked, “Were the police called?” Sherry said no, but that the bully had a police record. It was not possible for me to verify this story due to the confidentiality involved. Nevertheless, I asked Sherry how she responded to that incident in her role as a mediator. She said:

We were in teams and my friend was in this particular team and it was a bit difficult for us because we naturally sympathized with the victim. It was a little harder than other mediation sessions to be neutral and not favour and not to show either one that we were leaning towards any body. All we had to do at all times just keep cautiously aware of where we were and what we were doing and remember that these are two people and they do both have feelings and there is something, is not just one day it started happening; there is something that triggered it. So, we had to try and get to that before we could come up with any solutions.

Sherry is at School F where a lot of violent incidents are reported in the local newspaper. It is possible that mediators must deal with dangerous conflicts. Anything is
possible in a school community where there are so many incidents in a day. It is possible too, that a mediation that starts out as a normal conflict suitable for peer mediators to resolve could develop into a conflict that is dangerous. Other mediators had less dangerous stories. Nancy, for example, speaks of a common conflict among high school students which is boyfriend/girlfriend misunderstandings. Nancy describes a conflict as a situation when, “someone allegedly takes another person’s girlfriend or boyfriend away from them.” I asked her how she would, as a peer mediator respond to that conflict. She explains

I would sit the alleged girlfriend/boyfriend stealer and then the ex and listen to both of their sides and their arguments and what not, and see where we go from there. I can’t really tell the person who is accusing the other person that, that didn’t happen and that person chose to be with the other person but I just have to let them see that for themselves.

Some conflicts get out of hand. They end up as fights. A conflict means different things to different people. Shirley, for example, defines a conflict in terms of a fist fight. She says, “a conflict would be something like when two people get into a fist fight or a horrible fight over rumours or disagreements over little things.” The differences in the types of conflicts that occur in schools and the varying perspectives of what constitutes a conflict create the need for the mediators and their advisors to make special preparations before, during and after mediation.

**MEDIATING CONFLICTS**

The peer mediators express many thoughts and varying emotions about the peer mediation process. They share how they mediate and why their peers listen to them. To ensure that readers get a clear sense of the peer mediation process I have organized this section under three topics. The first is the preparation that the
students and their advisors make before mediation starts, the second is mediating the conflict (the process) and the third section is a reflection on the process: comments/ supporting evidences from the participants about specific aspects of the process.

**Preparation for Mediation**

The mediators were asked to walk me through the peer mediation process. They explained what happens before, during and after mediation. Before mediation the mediators and their coordinator have two main tasks to accomplish. The first is to speak with the disputants and confirm that the disputants agreed to go to mediation because peer mediation is voluntary. Nancy speaks of her experiences in two schools, where she was a mediator. She says the disputants are given a clear choice to accept peer mediation or to reject mediation.

In both schools they asked the students first if they want to have mediation or be suspended and if they choose mediation well they would have the mediation process and if they agreed to it then they would not be suspended. But if they choose suspension then they would just be suspended and there would be no mediation after or any follow-ups.

The disputants are told the location of the mediation and the names of their mediators. If for any reason one disputant is not comfortable with the choice of peer mediator(s) the coordinator will chose other disputant(s). The coordinator also asked the disputants about their understanding of the peer mediation to ensure that they knew what to expect when they go to mediation. Nevertheless, the peer mediators explain the process to the disputants before the process begins. The second task is to find a suitable location for the mediation.
**Physical Arrangements**

Physical arrangements are a consideration for many in the mediation process. Sherry says, “The chairs are set up two facing each other, sort of like in a cross, and mediators sit opposite each other, disputants sit opposite each other.” Mediation takes place in different locations. In Bonny’s school the mediators have their own peer mediators’ room and in addition they had a room in Student Services where mediation also took place. Bonnie explains the value of a special room for mediation. She says

I just found it’s a more comfortable area than if you’re mediating it in the office. First of all, you are in the office. It’s scary and you already have these problems and it’s just like you take something to the office. Peer mediation is not such a thing as getting your friend in trouble, if it gets to the office point they are not gonna be friends anymore. They are gonna be angry at each other for the rest of the year or whatever. I just know there are more possibilities for them not to be friends or come to an agreement if we are doing it there because once it goes all the way to the principal their parents could be called; it’s just gone too far for them to kinda go back.

No other school in this study provides a room for the peer mediator because they do not have the space. Bonny’s school population is only 620 students so they have the space but in most other schools the mediators conduct the mediation wherever there is an available space. For example, in Marvin’s school there is no space so they use the administrators’ seminar room if it is available.

We mediate conflicts in our school’s seminar room after school for approximately one hour. One session will probably go about ½ hour to 1 hour. It depends on how quickly we reach a resolution.

It is not just any space where mediation should take place. What is needed is a private space. Sherry’s story illustrates that need for privacy.

We do have these two seminar rooms in our learning centre, small little rooms where they have small classes and we can do it in there. I don’t like that too much because they have windows that have blinds, the door has
two big glass panels everybody can see in and I know this mediation we did this one girl was really upset and she was crying and everybody can see into the room and if somebody knew what's going on they would understand, if not, they would wonder and they would keep asking, "Why were you crying there? Why did it look so serious?" A friend walked by and she sorta looked in the door. She was another mediator so she clicked that this was a mediation but everybody can see everything that's going on in that room. It's not just the best place but we really don't have very many places that we can go to during the middle of the day to do mediations.

The Mediation Process

During the mediation process the students further prepares the disputants for the mediation. Shirley identifies five steps of the peer mediation process. They are: first, the opening when the mediators introduce themselves to the disputants, explain the process and the ground rules; second, the sharing and paraphrasing of the stories; third, verifying the facts; fourth, brainstorming for solutions; and fifth, the closing, when the disputing parties establish common grounds and interests and a written agreement is signed by all parties involved in the mediation. The peer mediators know the process well. What follows is their explanation of the process.

The Opening: Step 1

June prepares the disputants who are involved in a fight to partake in the mediation process. This is what she does

First of all we just tell them that mediation is something that is gonna help them. It's not that someone is gonna try to pick their brains and act like guidance counsellors or anything like that. We are just there to like sort of look on and see how to help them get through their facts and their feelings. Also, it is not something where we are gonna lecture them or anything. It's like they are just getting through their own conflict and we are helping them with the resolution but we remain completely neutral so it's not like we are getting on either side or anything. So, it's completely neutral in that way and that sense.

Second are the introductions. Mediation usually begins with the mediators' dialogue. It assures the disputants that the mediators are trained to mediate their
conflict. The students will either recite the dialogue or they read an already prepared statement. The following mediators’ statement is from School B.

Hello, my name is ... and my partner is ... We are trained mediators. We have volunteered to help you to solve your conflict. We believe that we can work things out. We congratulate you for volunteering to participate in the mediation process. Everything that happens in this room during the mediation will be kept confidential. Each of you will get the opportunity to share your stories. We expect that you will both listen carefully when the other is speaking. We may take some notes to help us remember the facts but we will destroy them at the end of the mediation. When you both reach an agreement, the terms of the agreement will be written and we will have you both sign it. You will both receive a copy of the agreement and the program coordinator, who will be monitoring the follow-up of the agreement, will also receive a copy.

Third are the ground rules. Shirley explains:

First we go through the ground rules to make sure they (disputants) wouldn’t do it again; no hitting, no yelling, no name calling, no throwing things across the room etc. We go through the process generally in a similar way but we try and make them realize that what they did wasn’t the right way to do it. They could have solved it another way. We also make sure that they understand that it’s not a way to solve it (fights). They could just talk it over and it would help a lot.

The explanation of the ground rules leads deeper into the process. This is when the seating arrangements and adherence to the ground rules are of greatest importance. Marvin is a mediator with 40 to 50 hours of training to his credit. In his description of the mediation process he stresses some additional points that are important to the process and leads the discussion to step 2 (sharing the stories and getting the facts). He highlights what happens during the opening stage including the ground rules.

We are seated in a manner where each disputant faces each other. One would present their case while the other listens. During that time we don’t allow any kind of interruption, no outburst whatsoever, no kind of names, no interruptions.

These ground rules are established by the peer mediators and their advisors. All mediators use the same ground rules which they either recite or read to the
disputants immediately before mediation starts. The following are the ground rules used at School L.

a). All relevant information will be shared;
b) Everything discussed will be kept confidential;
c) Name-calling, blaming, yelling or interrupting will not be allowed;
d) Please listen to each other carefully while you share your story. You will both get the opportunity to speak;
e) Please be honest;
f) You must control your emotions;
g) We may call separate meetings to clarify issues;
h) You will both approve the final agreement;
i) Either of you may choose to end the mediation process at any time, but the reason(s) must be given why you think that the process should end.
j). Do you have other rules which you would like to add?

June, a mediator who has more than 400 hours of training, summarizes the opening, introduction and ground rules.

Mediation begins by introducing yourself, your partner and the mediation process. First, we go over the ground rules and then discuss what is mediation, how we are going to help them (disputants) how we are going to be neutral and that it’s completely confidential. Some of the ground rules are no name calling, no yelling, no bad words just things like that.

**Getting the Facts: Step 2**

This step begins with the mediators inviting the disputants to share their stories. The goal is to get the facts from each disputant, have them paraphrase what they hear, and then verify the facts. Bonny explains how this happens during the mediation:

Well we (mediators) would ask each disputant their side of the story and how they see their perception of it happening and then we would go from there asking them how it started and why they said anything. We would get the facts first and then we would go to feelings and ask them, ‘how do you feel getting yelled at or screaming at by somebody.’ Placing them in each others shoes and then we have our resolution from there.

The stories shared must be complete in order for the truth to be known. Often disputants do not know both sides of the story until they go to mediation. This step
allows them to hear each others’ version of the story, perhaps for the first time but in a safe environment. Then the truth may be told. Paraphrasing is very important too because it ensures that the disputants are listening and they can then partake in verifying the facts.

**Verifying the Facts: Step 3**

The mediator has to verify the facts by asking specific questions about the conflict. For example the mediators need to know what happened to cause the conflict, where it happened, when, and the people who were involved. Marvin provides the link between getting the facts (step 2) and verifying the facts (step 3).

He said

> When that first individual completes what he or she has to say we would ask the second party to paraphrase in their own words what the person says, and if it's true we verify this and verify that and the same thing will apply to the second person.

If the facts are not sufficient to verify the stories the conflict may remain unresolved.

That may result in the postponement of the mediation. Shirley explains what happens when the facts are not verified.

> When that first individual completes what he or she has to say we would ask the second party to paraphrase in their own words what the person says, and if it's true we verify this and verify that and the same thing will apply to the second person.

Then it begins. First, we talk about the facts. We get the facts out. Exactly what happened during the conflict. Oh, we have each person tell their side of the story and the other person paraphrases their side of the story. This is just to put people in other peoples' shoes to see if they can understand how the other person was feeling at the time and after we get through the facts and they agree on the facts and everything we can start getting into feelings and how about it and we go through each person’s feelings and bla,bla, bla. Usually by that time if we still have problems trying to get them to agree or they can't seem to agree on any common ground and they completely disagree with each other, then we would say, “Ok. We have to continue this mediation at another time. Maybe you guys just need some time to cool off and we will meet again maybe next week and schedule a time.” **Break in mediation** - session will continue

Postponing the peer session is one way to deal with unresolved conflicts during a mediation. Another method is to call separate meetings with the disputants. This is
particularly suitable in situations when the stories do not match. This type of meeting is called a caucus.

**Caucus**

The disputants do not always speak the truth. Sometimes the stories shared and the explanations given to the peer mediators are very different and so the mediators may need time-out to share their perceptions and develop new strategies which may help the disputants recognize common grounds. This time-out is called a caucus. It also allows the mediators the time to meet separately with each disputant to verify their stories and to find out what their interests are in the process.

The mediators may postpone the mediation for a day or more depending on the situation. On the other hand, if the mediators can verify the stories during the process there is no need for a caucus. Sherry explains the actual mediation and when a caucus is needed.

One (mediator) would introduce the mediators and introduce the process. The other mediator would do the ground rules and then we start off by just arbitrarily choosing one person to speak: telling their side of the story without the other person interrupting them. That's very important to make sure they get the story without being interrupted. Then we switch over to the other person, they tell their side of the story, then the mediators then have a chance to question and clarify. Usually at this point, although it's not encouraged, they can go back and forth. If it gets out of hand we have to stop that. Usually, at this point, my partner and I usually opt to let them go back and forth because that is a good chance for them to bring out a lot of what they are feeling and get straight answers from the other person. They go back and forth. If we find that we are going around in a circle we call a five minutes caucus when the mediators would step out of the room. We go over what we said, and then give the disputants a breather, come back and go at it again and then if we cannot solve anything we call a separate meeting if we have to.

If the resolution is going well, the mediators brainstorm for possible solutions.

**Brainstorming: Step 4**

The disputants are searching for solutions. This involves brainstorming and
making a plan to resolve the conflict. As the disputants brainstorm the peer mediators must be alert and prompt to note the best ideas that will help to solve the conflict. It takes experience to recognize when the disputants are ready to brainstorm. This is how June knows when brainstorming is appropriate.

If they are getting along and if they seem to be on the same wave length then we go, ok well then, how do you feel (about) the next time something like this comes up? How are you gonna deal with it?

When the mediators begin to acknowledge common interests and common goals of the disputants then an agreement is in sight. Marvin explains what transpires before an agreement is reached. He explains:

After both of them (disputants) have their cases out on the table, we would ask them if they can think of another way to approach the situation where they wouldn't have offended one another or if they see another way to approach it. If they say yes, we would say to them, "please, by all means tell us how you would do it." After they are finished we turn to the other person and say, "do you accept that?" The other person will say yes or no and what they think would be suitable or appropriate. Then we would see if the other person complies. If not, we don't force them because mediation is not about force. It's about agreeing and agreeing mutually and if the other person complies with what then we start to brainstorm.

At this stage the disputants begin to think of solutions to their problems and consider ways that they can avoid the same problem from reoccurring. The disputants will also discuss situations or individuals that may prevent them from abiding to the contract. The mediators help them to prepare for the questioning that they may face from their friends. They usually decide to tell their friends that the conflict is over. Once all these details are worked out the mediators begin to list the points of the agreement that the disputing parties have decided upon. Marvin continues
We start to think fast. It becomes spontaneous then. (We say) all right, you said that, you said that and that, you agree with that, OK? So we reach an understanding here and we draw up the dotted line and we ask (for) both participants for their signatures and they are made aware of the terms under which they are signing the document or a piece of paper. It goes to the principal and if it (agreement) is not carried on then alternative consequences will follow.

**The Agreement: Step 5**

The agreement is the final stage of the mediation. Both disputants must agree to the terms, for example, the terms under which they will live together in the same school and outside of the school. Sherry explains what is involved in the agreement. She says:

> We have an agreement that we have to sign at the end saying what we have resolved and then both disputants sign that they agree to it. Both mediators sign that they agree to it, the coordinator would sign and if there is an additional supervisory teacher they would also sign. Everything is dated and each person gets a copy. Usually in the agreement as well is what happens if the agreement is broken so that every base is covered. There are no loopholes, no room for anybody to step out of bounds.

Bonny recalls the following about the agreement. She says:

> We had to fill out a lot of forms, we had to fill out what they wanted out of mediation, do they want to be friends again, or did they just want the other person to leave them alone or they want the other person to stop talking to them or stay away from them or whatever the problem was. So they write that down and we see what the common ground was which is very important because that's where we can work from. Because if only one wants to be friend of the other one you can't make the other person want to be their friend. You have to work from where they are in agreement and so we write up an agreement and you know it's like this person A is not gonna talk about the other person behind their back if person B will stop doing the same or whatever the case may be and they agree, sign, shake hands, and that's it.

There are many different ways to write the agreements but the version that School E uses is as follows:
Peer Mediation Agreement

Date:

We ________________ and ________________ agree to do the following in order to solve our conflict:

1. ________________________________________________________________________________

2. ________________________________________________________________________________

Signature of disputants: ________________  ________________
Signature of mediators: ________________  ________________

The students identified five steps to the mediation process. They described the opening, the resolution and the closing. When all the steps are combined, the mediation process that they shared is as follows:

Summary of the Peer Mediation Process

Step 1:  Introductions (mediators)
(a) explanation of the mediation process
(b) ground rules shared

Step 2:  Stories shared (disputants): Getting the facts
(a) My side/your side
(b) Paraphrasing

Step 3:  Verification of facts (mediators)
(a) The incident
   - what happened?
   - why did it happen?
   - when did it happen?
(b) Feelings
   - How did the incident make you feel?

Step 4:  Brainstorm for Solutions
(Develop ways to improve the situation)

Step 5:  The Agreement
(a) Signing the agreement

June summarizes the role of the peer mediator in the agreement stage. This is what
she says:

We help them (disputants) through, how they are gonna deal with it. So we kinda make a plan for them and we write down on a sheet what they have to sign and this sheet goes through each of the parts of the plan how they are going to treat each other and how they are going to deal with each other. Just basic rules that they have to agree to and that's like the agreement. They both have to sign the agreement and both mediators sign the agreement so it's like a contract and any other notes that were taken during the mediation are destroyed so that the mediation remains completely confidential and that's what happens during the mediation.

**Unstructured Mediation**

Similarities exist in the manner in which the mediators conduct the process. However, in some schools the peer mediation process is more developed than in others. For example, there is no structure to the peer mediation process in Gina's school. This is what she says:

No formal mediation took place in my school. Students (mediators) went out into the halls when they could spare the time and approached anyone who seemed to be in a conflicting situation. We had no coordinator, no set time to mediate, no formal mediation and no follow-up.

Nevertheless, the peer mediators have no doubt about what happens during the mediation process. They know the process well and they follow it. The disputants also believe in the process although most do not reflect on what happens during mediation. In an interview with a disputant I asked, “What happened during the process?” The response was as follows:

We discussed. He got to say his part and I said my part. We talked around it. We signed a sheet.

However, others involved in the process are more reflective of it.

**Implication of the peer mediation process:**

One implication of the peer mediation process is that students are listening to one another. Bonny shared the reason why students listen more to their peers than
they do to their teachers, vice principals, principals or any other adult in the school community. She says

Students listen to me because I understand them. Everyone’s school experience is different, and the closer you are in age the more easily you can understand what their school experience was. My parents wouldn’t understand what happens in my school and I wouldn’t understand what happened in grandparents’ school. Some had one room school houses. You just can’t understand how very important it is that someone made fun of the fact they you were wearing Sears jeans or something. If you are older you’ll say what’s wrong with Sears jeans? They are fine jeans! No, no you’ve got to have Levi’s or Tommy Hilfiger. Just being closer to someone in age you realize what the major problems are then you can understand it and you won’t belittle it because it’s what you’re going through or just had gone through two years ago or something like that. So it’s easier to identify with the person.

Bonny says that her peers listen to her because she understands their problems. Other mediators have similar answers. They say that their peers trust them and they trust the mediation process. One mediator explains how the trust develops during the mediation process. She said:

Well, during mediation they (disputants) begin to opening up, they trust each other to tell each other their story, they actually start to talk it out, and so as they talk it out they start to trust us and believe that maybe with our help they can end this instead of keeping it in forever and ever.

The most recurring response from the mediators is that peers trust their peers because they are their age and they can relate to each other more than they can to adults. Shirley, a mediator, says:

Because I guess we are students too, we live the life they live we do everything they do and they will respond to us more than they will respond to a teacher because they can relate to us better.

Habermas’ concept of an “ideal speech situation,” a social condition in which the parties to public discourse are in a situation of equality and autonomy (Seidman, 1994, p. 178) emanates from the students’ explanations. The disputants are not constrained by fear or repercussions or power hierarchy when they share their
conflicts with the peer mediators. Instead, like Habermas explains, peers speak as equals because they have so much in common. June's response to the question, "Why do the students listen to you and not to their vice principal, teachers or some other adult," supports my point. Judy said:

I think it is because basically a peer, being someone who is their own age and someone they might feel can understand them more and I think maybe they feel that we are not like patronizing them because we are not looking down on them like an adult would we are trying to look at them at the same level and so they feel that they can talk to us like other people can.

Habermas' theory of Communicative Action is very evident in the responses from the students. Marvin, on the other hand, explains that the maturity of the peer mediators causes their peers to listen to them (the peer mediators).

Well, it depends on the mentality. If kids are approached by kids that sound like kids and act like kids, they won't listen, most of them won't but if they are approached by people who sound and act like responsible young people and who are looking after their best well being they will listen because mediators carry and they uphold a certain reputation about themselves. You don't see mediators getting into fights, as a matter of fact that is not a part of what we promote. We try to stay as clean as possible.

Bonny can speak with some authority about the impact of the peer mediation program on students. At the time of the interviews she changed roles from being a disputant to becoming a mediator. I inquired about the effects of the change on Bonny's personally. She was very positive about the impact that the peer mediation program has on her as a disputant and now as a mediator. She explains:

Before I entered peer mediation I used to be mean toward my friends and I always fought with them. Like anytime they talked to me I would tell them to go away and leave me alone and we wouldn't talk for days, weeks, months and when I went to peer mediation I realized that it's not right to be fighting with your best friends because they took something from you or they told this big secret of yours to other people and others like that. It changed me because I stopped being rude to my friends and I don't fight with them any more. It really changed my life, my friends and my family.
She also says that peer mediation taught her to stay out of trouble and “I think before I act now.” Peer mediation has changed her life. She explains the type of person that she has now become.

I am glad that I am a mediator because it changed me a lot. I'm not mean, I'm not selfish toward any of my friends or my family, I'm always helping out and giving a hand whenever someone needs it. I'm not mean. I'm a decent person.

The student’s understanding of the peer mediation process is evident from the responses to the questions asked about the process. They and their peers (disputants) also believe in the process. However, the process does not end after mediation.

**Follow-up to Mediation**

Except for Nancy, all the peer mediators are aware of a follow-up to the mediation that they do (Nancy has never mediated so that might account for her not knowing about the follow-up after the mediation process). The students explain that the mediation process does not end after mediation because someone has to ensure that the agreement is adhered to. If the agreement is not followed the conflict could be returned to mediation or sent to the vice principal who will give the disputants a traditional consequence. June explains what happens in her school after mediation

The process does not end after the mediation because the people still have to deal with each other and they still have to carry out the rules that we put down in the agreement, at the mediation. So, it’s not like it ends right there because if it ended right there it means that they wouldn’t obey the agreement and they would be breaking it. They would have to come back to mediation again. The teachers and the VPs make sure that it’s followed because they also know what the agreement is and how things are.

In Bonny’s school the coordinator does the follow-up to the agreements. The
coordinator meets with the disputing students to ensure that the agreement is kept.

She explains

There is always a follow-up. The vice principal and the mediation coordinator would follow-up on those students to make sure the disputants haven't been into any fights, make sure that they stick to their agreements and respect the other persons' wishes.

In Sherry's school the peer mediators and the coordinators do the follow-up to the conflicts mediated. They do a similar investigation of the mediation agreement as in Bonny's school. Sherry explains what is involved in the follow-up.

The coordinator calls each student, has a talk with them just to see how things are. In the case of a mediation involved with bullying and harassment, we had one follow-up meeting two weeks later to see how everything is and if any new developments have come up and also would they like to air it. Because of the severity of that case the VP keeps an eye on it but you never just let it go all together. There is always a follow-up somehow usually by the coordinator. In this case it is the vice principal as well as our follow-up meeting.

Marvin talks about the disputants shaking hands after the mediation as a sign of putting closure to the conflict and he explains the importance of a follow-up after mediation. He says:

There is a follow-up on the situation. After the mediation ends and the documents are signed, depending on the situation, they may want to give a hand shake and move on. There is a follow-up process to see if the parties involved actually comply with the rules that they set down for themselves and to know how they are coping with stuff like agreeing to ignore each other when they see each other and go the opposite way. Follow-up like that will occur. I guess we do this in case the conflict reoccurs then we can always refer to the record of the agreement.

One administrator who is a coordinator of the program in her school explains what is involved with the follow-up of the agreement. She says:

There is a follow-up by me and other staff with the students involved. We try to find out if the agreement is withheld and how the relationship is progressing. If the agreement is not working, we interview the parties involved and we may or may not have another mediation session.

Most successful mediations end with an agreement, verbal or written. Most schools
prefer a written agreement for the reasons that Marvin expressed. If a fight recurs between the same disputing parties the agreement may be useful to analyse the origins of the conflict.

IMPLEMENTATION AND ORGANIZATION

This section explores what is involved in the implementation of a peer mediation program in a school. The purpose is to find out how much teacher time is involved in the planning, the cost of resources and the cost of training. The most important resource in the implementation is human. One principal says:

The essential resource is human. You need a trained individual which we were fortunate to have. We also had contacts with other potential trainers at the university level and elsewhere, human resources, fiscal resources to order a fewer video tapes and books and the like are needed to implement the program.

This principal also shared the financial cost of the program. He said that to provide effective training for the students the program would probably need a small video library, a resource library for both students and teachers which would cost between $400 and $500. In another large school, the requirements for the implementation of the peer mediation program are similar. The coordinator says:

The resources, to my knowledge, are more people resources. We have one guidance counsellor and a youth worker who prepare the mediators to mediate. They work with the students, in fact they did this about three weeks ago where they took two days and went to the church and spent the two days preparing them for this. Other than that I am not aware, in terms of what resources they may be using but these are the two people that take charge and work on the program.

Some school administrators use certain support staff to assist the teachers with the peer mediation program. For example, in one school the Child and Youth Worker (CYW), a Guidance counsellor and a teacher were responsible for the program. In another school one CYW and two other teachers were in-charge of the program.
One administrator explains the human resource needs for the peer mediation program.

We are limited. We have a CYW and we have two other teachers that are involved in the peer mediation program. The CYW seems to be very, very supportive of the program. He has done very well. He is one of the advocates. Also there is this teacher. She is an advocate. She believes in it, she uses one of the resource persons to help her but generally the focus is students. Some things they (teachers) do for themselves but what she is trying to do is to get a nucleus of students and have them take it beyond that. That is what I mean (by saying that) the program is not being well developed when the students handle it and deal with it. We still rely on teachers, I think, too much.

Other administrators also see human resource as the key to the implementation of the program. An administrator from a school of more than 2,000 students also says that the implementation needs mostly people resources. He explains that in his school they have a group of people who are trained to mediate and a teacher in charge of getting the disputants and the mediators together when there is a conflict.

All participants refer to the use of teacher time. An administrator who is also a coordinator says

Usually a fair amount of teacher time is needed to implement a peer mediation program but this school had a program some years ago so reviving the program will not involve much teacher time. If the same teachers become involved teacher time would be approximately one hour per week to prepare for meetings and to plan. The actual amount of teacher-time for mediation could range from half a day to the complete day.

She explains that if planning was done in the past it makes things easier. “It’s a matter of commitment to the program,” she says. The perception at her school is that the absence of visible violence means “there is peace” which she believes is a false perception as was the case of the Littleton murders (Compton, 1999). In that case, the principal in the study does not see the need for a peer mediation program. For the principal, the program is only needed where there are violent conflicts in a school. The coordinator has implemented other peer mediation programs. She
itemizes the cost of resources as follows:

| Cost of resources (materials) = $1,000.00 (approximately) |
| Training of students = $1,000.00 (minimum) |
| Training of staff advisors = $1,000.00 |
| Workshops for teachers etc. = $800.00 |
| TOTAL = $3,800.00 |

An administrator, who was transferred to a school where there is a peer mediation program, describes the program as “planned like an activity that one might think of doing when one had nothing else to do.” Teacher time, some say, is very essential to implement the program and to avoid this perception of the program. At the time of writing, teachers are not actively involved in any after school activity in this school Board. As a result, administrators who are coordinating the peer mediation program are very busy. The administrator had the following to say:

I think the stakes have been raised substantially in the last couple of years with regards to the growth of this building and the kinds of incidents that come up daily. So, in terms of just what’s been involved in it, I would say lately, right now it’s become a very heavily involved task from the perspective of the administrative involvement. Much, much more so than it was in the past and so far as teacher time planning, the recent situation (teacher strikes) and conditions in the schools have virtually eliminated any teacher being involved in it. But over all, I would say that in the past there has been some teacher time involved in it and it has been very significant in terms of its development.

He says that he does peer mediation every day, all different kinds and at all different levels. He spends about 8 to 10 hours in the past three months and that his task is a far more difficult one without the teachers’ help. My question was, “Who coordinates the peer mediation program before you came here?” He says:

A young teacher of two or three years did it (peer mediation) because no one else wanted to. They use to play catchy songs on the PA and try to get people involved but I think it’s a great idea but who opted to use it? I think very, very few because I don’t think that the antics around it suggested to the greater number of kids that it actually made a difference or that it worked. So this is something that we are working on.

A coordinator who is not an administrator gave me a summary of what is
involved in terms of human resources and time. This is what she says:

We do 12 hours of training which is two 6 hour days when we take the students out of school and we run them through the paper part of the rules of confidentiality, some ice-breaking activities and some role playing. It's two pretty heavy duty days and it's just ongoing. We have meetings but not on scheduled basis every time something new seems to be happening in the school just to update ourselves with the kids and talk about new techniques.

The coordinators were better able to say how much time and resources are involved in the implementation of the program because their records helped them to assess what is needed and what has to be done. However, the teachers who are consistently involved found it difficult to assess the time that they spent on the program.

Seven teachers were interviewed and except for one, they do not know how much time or what resources are needed to implement the program. The teacher who could best answer the question has been a coordinator of the peer mediation program. He says the following:

Well, it is very time consuming. I had to make several trips to different schools in Toronto area and this was quite time consuming, but it was worthwhile so I don't mind the time factor since we were interested in having conflict resolved effectively. I don't think the time factor is all that important.

This teacher visited other coordinators of peer mediation programs who were very involved in the program in their school. He says that when they started the program they did not know a lot about peer mediation. He found a coordinator who he says was "a very, very, effective source in terms of guiding us along and he actually was kind enough to come here and spend time with us and take us through some programs and actually watch kids go through the program." The visiting coordinator was one of the most instrumental persons in terms of helping them to implement
their peer mediation program in their school. In terms of time, the teacher told me that about 4 to 5 hours are needed weekly to implement the program. That includes planning, preparing students for the process and actually working through the process.

The students also devote a lot of time to the implementation of the program. A large responsibility for the implementation of the program rests with the peer mediators. They put the plans into action when they mediate and they sacrifice their lunch and spares to make the program work. One coordinators says,

Peer mediation takes place usually during the lunch period of the mediators. However, some might take place before and after school.

The students also say that they mediate when it was convenient for the disputants and for them to meet. It was usually a sacrifice on the part of the peer mediators' that made the mediation possible. Often, they give up their lunch periods. June's response to the question is as follows:

Usually (we mediate) either on one of our lunches which could be anytime from around 1:30 in the afternoon, it could be at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, after school and whenever we can get everyone together at the right time with the two disputants. Probably at 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

In one school the coordinator says, "immediately, immediately, when the conflict occurs we deal with it right away." The "we" is the peer mediators and when there is a situation that has to be mediated in a hurry for the good of the school community, the peer mediators are sometimes taken out of class to mediate the conflict.

Most of the time it's (peer mediation takes place) after school but if there are some issues that we think need to be resolved we would set aside some time during class.
At Sherry's school they also mediate conflicts as they happen. She says that they mediate conflicts "right now (as it happens) or as soon as possible." This is what she says:

Usually we do them during the day whenever is the best time for the mediators and we have the disputants leave class.

Sherry says that she does not miss classes because she and her mediation partner have the same lunch period. She also says, "we mediate when we are free or sometimes during school or after school if it is really busy." Bonny's experience is different. She mediates only during school. She says:

We did them (mediation) either at lunch time and if that couldn't happen we wrote down what periods we could more easily miss from class. You could miss maybe science or math, you could miss gym or drama, or something like that and so whenever the day of mediation was planned for she (advisor) would see who is free at that time. That's when we go. We never did it after school or before school.

It seems that mediation takes place at different times in all the schools. It is obvious that the peer mediators keep the process going because it is during their lunch and free time when mediation takes place. Nancy summarizes where and when some mediation take place when she says that mediation takes place during the day when there was a specific room set up for it and it was whenever the two people in conflict could get together and there would be two mediators available. During their lunch time, spares, before school, after school whenever it was a good time for everybody but they wouldn't be withdrawn from classes to do it.

Another consuming aspect of the implementation of the program is the weekly meetings. During these meetings continuous training takes place. Therefore, additional time is required of both the students and the coordinators on a weekly basis in most cases. One coordinator even met more frequently. She says, "we met twice a week initially because it was quite an undertaking."
Summary

This chapter describes the types of conflicts that occur in school and how the peer mediators mediate conflicts between their peers. Illustrations are provided of the mediation process and the five steps that the students use when they mediate a conflict. Readers are given the opportunity to understand what happens before mediation starts, during mediation and after mediation. Also what happens when students refuse mediation. In addition, the peer mediators, staff and administrators give an insight into fights in schools. They explain the disruptions in classes and the school community and helps the readers to understand more fully life in school today. Varying perspectives about the peer mediation process are provided. There is a discussion, too, about the implications of the process and the implementation and organization of the peer mediation process. For the first time there is a cost attached to the process in terms of teacher time and resources.

This is perhaps the most valuable chapter for peer mediators, educators or anyone who may be planning to implement a peer mediation program. Of particular value is the section on Mediating Conflicts. To date very little is available on How To Mediate which can provide a guide to practising mediators especially peer mediators. The information that the students shared in this chapter is very powerful because a lot of information is revealed about conflicts in schools, how to mediate and how to implement a peer mediation program which are not usually found in one place.
CHAPTER 8

POST-MEDIATION: OUTCOMES OF PEER MEDIATION

This section reports two things: the impact of peer mediation on the schools and the impact on the peer mediators. The participants of this study have three different perceptions of the impact of peer mediation in schools. The first is that it has a positive impact on the school community. Most administrators say that the peer mediation program has a positive impact on the school climate. They are mostly interested in the school climate, suspension, fights and violence in schools. However, they also say that peer mediation programs empower students who have been exposed to the process. The students are interested in the peace created in their school with the presence of a peer mediation program. School violence is on their minds and they speak of life in school before and after mediation. The teachers also praise peer mediation for bringing peace to their classrooms, but their main interests are the improved racial harmony and the reduction in the number of fights that they encounter in the classrooms.

The second perception is that the peer mediation program has a minor effect on the school climate because the issues faced in schools are too severe for mediation to resolve. The third perception is that peer mediation is not sufficiently developed and promoted in schools to reflect its real impact. Advocates of this view say that the concept of “peer mediation” is not accepted and supported by some staff members, the programs are not publicized in schools, and some students who are trained as peer mediators are not sufficiently utilized for the program to make
an impact. Peer mediation, in their view, can do more if it is given the opportunity and if it is supported. The differences in perceptions about the impact of the peer mediation program is best explained by the following administrator. He says:

I think the impact overall is positive. I think that it is very difficult right now to get an accurate perspective on any thing like this. What it will or will not mean to whoever you are speaking to will vary because a school like this with 2,500 kids is like a small city. Communication is really, really an issue and what I think about sometimes has a lot to do with my perspective. I am quite certain that I can get different perspectives not only from my colleagues but also from the 136 other teachers that work here and definitely from the 2500 students that are here.

**School climate**

Most participants of the study believe that the peer mediation program has a positive impact on their school climate. Marvin, a peer mediator, reflects on his years as a mediator and the impact that the peer mediation program has on the school climate. He talks about the frequent acts of violence that he has witnessed in the school community and the impact that the peer mediation program had on the reduction and eventual disappearance of violence in his school. This is Marvin's account.

When I first started at School E, believe it or not every other weekend there would be some grand act of violence. I remember one time a guy got a cut from his ears to his mouth, and that required I guess a couple dozen stitches. People were scared. I am not saying that peer mediation is single handedly responsible for alienating and eliminating every single act of violence in the school but at the same time you can't deny the fact that it has played a role in eliminating some of those conflicts before they escalated to that level. So, in all respect and in all conscience it has played a positive role in the school. Without a doubt I think that any school that does not promote peer mediation, is missing out on a very, very, very positive step on the future advancement of the school in regards to their students’ well being.
One administrator who has worked in two schools where there has been a peer mediation program speaks about the positive effects of peer mediation on suspension, fights and the general school climate.

As far as I am concerned it's a definite positive. Suspensions I have seen in my previous experience (school) go down, fights tend to go down because there are resolutions and the general school climate: very, very positive. Instead of using fist and verbal abuse to settle disputes they face one another and that's the more humane way to do things and the more civilized way to do things.

This administrator, having seen the positive impact of the program in two violent school environments, feels that every school should have a peer mediation program. He wants the program everywhere. He also says:

I think peer mediation should be mandated in every school. I think that the government should monitor this, they should track this. It should be encouraged, it's a positive way of resolving conflicts; I think the public should be made aware of it and I think every suspension or anything that's done in a school should have some kind of a peer mediation attachment, mainly to get the kids to talk. If they don't talk to one another it could eventually lead to incidents recurring over a period of time. Overall it is a very, very positive thing.

Another administrator who also worked in two different schools where there were peer mediation programs, believes in the program because he has also seen the positive impact of the program on both schools. “I’ve seen,” he says

Tremendous improvement in the school climate because peer mediation somehow is filtered to the students by the ones who are involved (disputants) and that is a deterrent in itself. Students don’t like to get into peer mediation because they know that they have to face a group of people. They don’t want to do that and as such it seems to me, that once the message goes out I would have students come to me and say, “I don’t want to peer mediate and therefore I stay away from conflicts, I don’t want suspensions which are another stage resulting from peer mediation.” When kids hear that, they don’t want to go into either and it really spreads through students, from student to student. Very rarely does it (information about peer mediation) go from vice principals to student body. I imagine it does go through guidance counsellors too.
He had more to say about the impact of peer mediation on the school climate. He spoke about it in terms of what it does for the students and the impact on a school climate and on fights. He started with the impact on the school climate. He says:

On a school climate it gives the students opportunities to discuss different points of views and that is an improvement in the school climate. It teaches powerful listening skills. When you are in a group you are forced to listen so it does help in school climate. You listen more when you get out of peer mediation. It teaches you to focus on the problem because the peer mediators, as soon as you start deviating, they bring you back on tract. Again, it helps to improve the school climate. It also teaches accountability. You did something. You are wrong. You become better later, after the group (experience). That also improves the school climate. In terms of accountability, it gives you the opportunity for eye to eye contact and the opportunity to voice your point of view too. All those things help in schools because sometimes you don’t get the chance to say what you want to say and this gives you the opportunity to speak out and so the school climate is improved. It has reduced suspensions I would say in 80% of the cases if the opportunity exists to do peer mediation. Sometimes you do not, the fight occurs and immediately it has to go to suspension because it is a vicious fight. When you have the opportunity or when the opportunity presents itself to do mediation before the verbal or physical battle, it seems to me, that in 80% of the cases suspensions are reduced.

Administrators and coordinators of the peer mediation program praise the program for the positive impact that it has on the school climate and on the mediators. An experienced administrator who coordinates a peer mediation program for the past five years says:

The peer mediation program has had tremendous and lasting effects on the school climate, the mediators and the opportunities for peaceful classrooms. The incidents of violence have reduced significantly from the number of incidents before mediation. The students are more conscious of conflicts and they are seeing a way out. Mediation has taught them that they do not have to remain in conflict with their friends or foes. There is a place and a process in place at the school to resolve problems. Classrooms are more peaceful because teachers have a place to send disputants to have their conflicts resolved and teachers can therefore concentrate on their teaching. All these factors put together create a more conscious school community to the issue of conflict.

This administrator has seen the changes within the school community since the
implementation of the peer mediation program. She says that the school community experienced consistent conflicts before the introduction of the program.

Teacher/student, teacher/teacher, student/student, parent/student and parent/teacher conflicts happened in that school daily and not just one a day. Many going on per day each day. People did not like or respect each other.

She disclosed that once the peer mediation program was implemented and some members of the school community heard that students were resolving their problems peacefully, the adults began to change. Some staff members who were in conflict with other staff members went to mediation conducted by staff mediators. The parent council also took an interest in the peer mediation program because their teenagers were mediating conflicts at home. Students were also mediating the conflicts between their parents. Parents, then, started to listen and to take peer mediation seriously because of the positive differences that they saw in their teenagers. They requested that the schools where their children attended implement the programs. They invited the peer mediators from the secondary schools and their advisors to speak about the peer mediation program to members of the school council. They began to educate themselves about the programs. I spoke with one such parent (see appendix G) who attended the School Advisory Council meeting and inquired about the peer mediation program. The meeting was called because of a high profile violent incident that happened that week in a large secondary school. Three grade nine girls severely beat and hurt another grade nine student almost to the point of death. Other students say that the grade nine student
was beaten because she was attractive. The parent believed that the peer mediation could have an effect on the school climate and prevent incidents like this repeating itself. She said:

Well, at the meeting the principal of the school spoke of an incident that occurred whereby three grade 9 students had beaten up another grade 9. Now his solution for this was to call the police and have the kids arrested. Now I personally think that there could be another way to punish or have some type of disciplinary action and I would not have chosen arresting because that will give the kids a record. So after hearing this, I asked the principal if they had peer mediation in their school. He told me that they did start a program but that the teachers that were involved were too busy and they couldn't continue with it. Now my personal interpretation of the whole thing was that seeing that sometimes the kids who get into trouble get into trouble because of peer pressure I think that if they had a mediation program whereby their own peers were talking to them you would find that solutions would be better formed or better accepted because it is like one kid talking to another or one buddy speaking to the other. I also thought that mediation is one way of solving some of the problems. If you choose to call the police every time a simple thing happens when you have the big problems what recourse will you take? I am not saying that we have to take the fact that the kids beat the girl lightly but I personally think that if it wasn't a serious situation by mediating, (mediating from the point that suspending them for a couple days or expelling them from the school for that matter), they still have the chance to get into another school or if they go through a suspension at least they can come back to a school without having a record but as it stands they don't have mediation and they have a record and they are only in grade 9. I think that is tarnishing their whole future. We don't know what led to the fight. Maybe it was something that occurred outside of the school that was now brought into the school and is being sorted out in the school system and these girls were punished for it. So, that is why I think if they had peer mediation for that particular problem everything would have been opened up or they would have been able to address the different issues that actually led to the fight.

This parent is very aware of the effects that peer mediation have on a school climate.

A coordinator of the peer mediation program also shares her perception of the impact of the program. In her role she has the opportunity to work very closely with students who are at risk of being unsuccessful in school for a variety of reasons.
She speaks with the knowledge of what is happening daily within the school community. She explains:

I think the peer mediation program has been incredible. We have had nothing but positives. The teachers are really good about letting kids out because they believe in the program. I walk in the foyer and two kids were about to go at it and I heard a kid say, “you know what, I have done this before and it didn’t work. Let me tell you what we have got to do.” And they did a mediation right then and there. So, I have seen kids who have been mediated go out there and worked on themselves. Kids have come back and say it has made a difference for them with their family relationships. We actually have three mediators who have come to us over the years as disputants. They did so well they are now mediating. So, it's powerful.

There seems to be no doubt in the minds of some members of the school community that the peer mediation program is making a positive impact on the school climate. An experienced administrator and coordinator of the peer mediation program gives his personal perspectives about the effects of the peer mediation program on the school climate. He says, “My personal perspective is that it is valuable but it is valuable in a select group of occurrences. In schools like this (2,500 students) I believe that a lot of the occurrences that take place, people aren’t looking to mediation to settle it for them. They are looking for a friend or they’re looking for their fist.”

The principal in the study says that after the implementation of the peer mediation program, students, teachers and parents say that they feel safer in the school. That school was previously described by the police as one of the most violent in the neighbourhood. The police and most members of the school community credit the safety to the impact of the peer mediation program. June has been a peer mediator for five years. She believes that the positive effects of a peer
mediation program reduce fights. She explains her first year in that secondary school.

Peer mediation has had tremendous effects on my school. When I was in grade 9 and I first came to this school there was quite a bit of tension and there were a lot of problems in the school with verbal and physical conflicts and I was scared because I was small and I didn't know how to act in a new school.

Fights and violence in school scare many students. Unfortunately, some see fights regularly in their school. That is the case in Sherry's school. She explains:

Every Friday after school we have our vice principals, principal, teachers, whoever is on duty, outside with walkie-talkies and someone inside monitoring the cameras. They are always in contact with each other and they can tell each other where to go. They keep saying, “go to this area, or that area, there is a big group there, go check it out.” We have incidents every day but on Fridays we have more incidents.

The fights at Sherry’s school are not isolated incidents. The students from different schools in this study have similar stories to tell, some more violent that others as in the case in Marvin’s school where a student was cut during a fight for a jacket. This incident was reported in the Toronto Star. A student in another school said, “We have a lot of fist fights and a lot of verbal ones too. The rumour flies that there are more drugs than textbooks and God knows what else.” Students consistently express their gratitude to peer mediation. They believe it helps to reduce violence in their school. The recurring response is, “I think it (peer mediation), has helped prevent further incidents of conflicts between students and it has prevented further alterations.”

Teachers seem to share the same sentiments about the positive impact of peer mediation on fights and violent incidents in schools. All the teachers in this
study praise peer mediation for the impact that the program has on the school community. One teacher, who works as a substitute teacher in eighteen different secondary schools each year, says that she has seen many different versions of the peer mediation programs. She speaks of the positive impact of the peer mediation programs in all the schools where she has worked. She says:

It just has a very positive impact in terms of discipline and fights. Some students do not follow the rules of the school. I would hate to think of what would otherwise happen without the program. I hope it gets implemented in all of the schools not just some of them.

Other teachers see a reduction in fights, discipline and racial tension. One teacher says that in his racially diverse school community they had lots of fights prior to the implementation of the peer mediation program. He says “since 1990 I have not seen a fight.”

I don't see anyone complaining about peer mediation. We need anything that can help. We have less clusters at the doors and the presence of the mediators. Peer mediation reduced fights and violence at the same time. Anything with knife and guns is out of peer mediation; the police should be involved.

The teachers also credit the peer mediation process for the peace that they enjoy in their classroom.

Sherry’s school makes the news in the local newspaper very frequently. Many incidents are reported as racially motivated. She explains that they have more racial fights than boyfriend/girlfriend disagreements or conflicts

I would say more racial than boyfriend/girlfriend but more and more we are seeing incidents between two groups of people. Even between guys and their friends. Two students have a conflict between each other one guy brings out his 25 friends the other his 50 friends and they duke it out.
She also says, “we do have students in our school who belong to organized gangs but they operate outside of the school. It’s the more unorganized gangs that we have in school.”

Some say that violence had reduced considerably since the peer mediation program was implemented in their school. Shirley, a peer mediator, for example had the following to say:

Well the violence has reduced considerably since the program. People know about it, people have been mediated and they know how to react to different situations differently. There has been a big drop in it (violence) and there is not that many fights anymore and if there are fights it’s between the grade 9s and grade 10s. The new kids in the school who really don’t know much about the program.

I asked Shirley how does she know that the program is making that impact on the school. She said, “because I have seen the changes.”

Schools are facing violent incidents. The only pro-active program that most students speak of is the peer mediation program. However, the peer mediation program is not suitable for certain types of incidents that happen in schools. An administrator spoke about an alternative choice with the Juvenile Justice System and their mediation program. The official title for the program is The School-Based Peer Mediation Program in Partnership with The Criminal Justice System. There are three primary goals of the program. The first is to keep young offenders out of the court system. The second is to provide an alternative to assist school administrators and the juvenile justice system in dealing with minor offences. The third is to provide an alternative to probation.

There are seven levels of partners involved in this program. First is the
school level: staff and students. That means the staff advisors of the peer mediation program and the trained peer mediators. Second is at the Board level: a superintendent. Third is Parent: a School Council Representative. Fourth is the Regional Police Officers. Fifth are the Trustees: Two. Sixth is The Crown Attorney’s Office and seventh is the Lawyer for Justice for Children & Youth. There are three stages when an incident happens and timelines are assigned to the actions that must be taken.

Step one is the reaction to an incident. When an incident occurs two things should happen within one to two days (see Table 9) - the incident should be reported to the school officials and the mediation screening committee (staff, peer mediators, administrator) should call the police for input. Within two to three weeks, step two becomes effective- the offenders are either charged or not charged. At this stage the neighbourhood police officers are usually involved. They will decide if the incident is chargeable or not. If there is no charge, the incident goes to peer mediation, but if there is a charge, the police will initiate the steps that must be followed. If mediation fails and there is no resolution, the incident will return to the police for a charge. Then there is no further action from the school. If there is an agreement the school monitors the agreement (step 3). In the case where there is a charge, the offender(s) has (have) two options. Option one is to go to mediation and in this case a charge is still pending. Option two is to go directly to Court. Again if there is no resolution, the offender(s) will attend Court, but if there is an agreement, the school will monitor the agreement (step 3).
Step 3 explains what happens in Court. It is the final stage. Within four months the incident reaches the Courts and the Peer Mediation Agreement becomes an Official Court document. The school Mediation Screening Committee reports to the Court whether or not the Peer Mediation Agreement was followed. In the case where there is a non-compliance within the four months, the offender(s) may return to mediation for clarification of the agreement or a charge is laid or no further action is taken. On the other hand the charges could be withdrawn. If the agreement are fulfilled, the charges would be withdrawn. The incident would return to court for full withdrawal, or an extension for completion placed on the case, or the charge is withdraw outside of court. This program is giving students another chance. The administrator says that the program is working to the advantage of the students and the police because more students are choosing mediation and the police are charging less students for petty incidents.

Participants contend that suspensions are reduced with the implementation of a peer mediation program. Yet the perception of the impact of the peer mediation program depends on the context within which participants work. Principals have to approve all suspensions and are answerable to all suspension appeals. Their opinion provides another perspective. The following is what one principal, who is an advocate of the peer mediation program, has to say about the impact of the peer mediation on suspensions.

There probably would be more suspensions for the kinds of conflicts that the peer mediators have been able to resolve in terms of the verbal assaults, and the minor physical kinds of assaults. So, I
would say because of the peer mediation program suspensions for those kinds of things have been reduced. In terms of fights over the past four years there has been significant reduction and we can plot that annually. This year there has been a slight increase in these activities, again just a handful from September through January. I don't think it reflects anything to do with the peer mediation program itself. It's much bigger than that. General school climate is much improved. Students feel safer, parents feel safe, teachers feel safe and we hear that regularly at our school council meetings. They view it as a very safe school and they attribute a lot of it to the peer mediation because our school council knows a lot about peer mediation through the influences that they have been shared with.

All administrators in this study who see the peer mediation program as effective to the school climate use peer mediation to put closure to suspensions caused by a fight. In some schools, peer mediation is often attached to suspensions for fights. Mediation may be given instead of a suspension. The principal says “a lot depends on the administrator and his or her awareness of mediation and the effectiveness of mediation.” On the other hand some administrators do not see peer mediation replacing suspension or any other consequence. They say that peer mediation makes a minor impact on the school climate. An administrator presents his view:

I think it makes a minor difference not a major impact. If we are going to issue a suspension it is usually a serious incident. There has been situations where it has prevented or prevents it from happening and from getting to the point where there is going to be a suspension. So, I think it helps in that regard but in many occurrences it passes that point. If there was a violent act we would be less willing to go to the mediation process and if there was already assault committed or whatever. So, in minor or in situations where there has not been any significant physical violence, it (mediation) may help deter suspensions.

A third administrator does not see peer mediation having much impact on the
decisions made at the administrative level. He sees peer mediation as not making a tremendous difference on some administrative decision making but he says that it has its place: kids listening to kids (a “kid thing”). He says:

I think the peer mediation program, the way I see it operating at our school, is one form of resolving conflicts. It doesn’t replace anything else, it doesn’t really replace suspension when it comes to physical fights. We still need to deal with teachers. We still call parents but it is one avenue that in certain circumstances can be very effective for students. It gives students a chance to talk about the issue without being full of emotions. They are in a sense obligated to listen to each other because that is a part of the rules and with their peers there, so they don’t see an authority figure necessarily judging them or giving them an ultimatum so it is one form of not controlling discipline but in terms of assisting with; its one way of diminishing or lowering the amount of conflict in the school. I could see peer mediation being more effective. In the time that I have been here, I have seen some use of it and some of it has been very effective. It cannot be used for everything, but it has its place and it allows students to talk and in some ways for some conflicts it is very effective.

The disputants believe that the peer mediation program brings peace to their lives and to their school. They speak in terms of what their school was before peer mediation was implemented into their school community. One disputant who went to mediation offers his perspective. He said, “It (peer mediation) brings love to the whole school. When you get into trouble you get somebody to be there. It puts those in conflict together.”

Bonny says that the school is more peaceful with the implementation of the peer mediation program. She had the following to say about peace in the school.

Oh definitely! If you actually get people working it out instead of a fist fight. I just knew that we didn’t have enough people coming for it (peer mediation). I think if you got to the point that it was a popular thing and you get people there it would make such a difference but we never really got it to that point in our school.
Another disputant who has been to mediation shares how peer mediation has made the lives of the students better. She describes the freedom that peer mediation brings to the school community. She explains:

Oh, before peer mediation, it was like a prison. Every student in the school was like they were in a prison cell, they were like yelling at each other, there were always fights, lots of violence in the school.

Bonny’s reflects on some of the changes:

It is pretty good in my school because it has come around and kids have been coming in and talking to us (mediators) and we help them out. Our school has been peaceful. Now there is hardly any fighting or any thing like that. We (mediators) hardly get kids to mediate. That’s how good it is. You don’t hear that much fighting, talking rumours, gossip, name calling stuff like that.

**Classroom Climate**

Except for one teacher, who knows very little about the peer mediation program, all the teachers interviewed praise the peer mediation program for bringing peace to their classroom. They see their lives in the classroom, racial harmony and fights in the school reduced. They credit the peer mediation program for the positive image that their school has. This is how one teacher feels about the program.

The peer mediation program is an excellent program in terms of relieving the school of any negative image. I mean either by students or by teachers. It made school activities extremely easy to be involved in, it was non threatening, students felt that if something happened there was a venue whereby they can have it looked at and I think that it was quite significant and for any school I would strongly suggest a peer mediation program even if things are working fairly well. It is not something to be used just as a last resort.

One teacher had problems with two male students in his class. He turned the problem over to the class to solve. The students sat in a large group and discussed
the problem, the strategies to solve the problem and the solution. The teacher observed the students mediate the conflict between themselves. He explains:

The classroom has become much better with specific reference to the two guys that I spoke about. They have worked together on a project, they talk to each other, I see them laughing and joking. Overall the kids feel more relaxed with them around. I can only see benefits from it (peer mediation). So I definitely recommend it in this school. I wish it could be utilized on a far greater basis than it is right now.

The teacher unrest and withdrawal of services between since 1997 has an impact on classrooms. In particular, it has caused some students to react to the lack of co-curricula activities. Some schools have experienced additional incidents of violence as a backlash. Teachers are the first group of educators to face this rebellion. One teacher said:

I think that there is less violence in the school and I know this from colleagues in other schools who said that violence has risen in their school because of the lack of extra curricular activities. In our school violence has not risen because of certain factors. The peer mediation program is one of the factors that helped us.

The teachers speak about lots of positives regarding peer mediation. Not only do they see a difference in the classrooms where they teach but also in certain community issues. One teacher related that the school was racially divided before the implementation of peer mediation. She has seen the change in the racial tension.

I find the school has become really better recently. I find that kids are getting on better and there are certainly very much less racial tensions in our school compared to previous times. I think it has been good and I know that peer mediation has been involved and responsible.
Value to Peer Mediators

Some members of the school communities see the value of the peer mediation program for the peer mediators. In particular, they observe peer mediators developing life long skills, respect for themselves, and each other, facilitating group interactions and saving relationships when they mediate. One administrator has the following to say about peer mediation:

It gives the disputants a different perspective of the situation when he/she goes to peer mediation. Before peer mediation they did not see the differences in the perspectives. Mediation requires students to cooperate, to sign a contract. That in itself is good. I like that about peer mediation. It gives students the opportunity to share their thinking and their perception on things. Before that, they didn't have the chance to share their thinking. I hear them say, "mind you, I'm wrong, but that is how I saw it. Peer mediation gives me the opportunity to share my thinking before I get into a fight". Peer mediation encourages students to share their views without holding back, it never ever says shut up, we don't want to listen to it, we are not ready for it. Instead, it encourages students to share their views and to clarify what they mean. Sometimes after mediation they admit to their peers, “I didn't know that? I have great respect for you. Is that how you really think?” I hear kids also say, “Is that how you really think about me? That's very nice of you.” The same people who fought.

Some believe that the peer mediation program also promotes and develops leadership skills in the peer mediators. Further, they believe that some students take more ownership for their problem and they tend to solve the conflicts with their peers in a satisfactory manner. This is the experience of a teacher:

I think it has helped students take ownership for their own problems, acknowledging that there is a conflict, and taking a leadership role and being a part of working together with their peers to develop resolutions to this. It has helped them realize that they are a part of the solution.

At the same time, the peer mediation program may develop a dependency on its leaders. A lot of dedication, time and hard work are involved in implementing and
maintaining a peer mediation program and a problem is created when coordinators are transferred to another school. This is the situation that this administrator is in.

How does one sustain it (peer mediation program) when the leadership leaves the program and that poses a real challenge to try and save it when you don’t have trained staff to continue it when one or two key people leave. That is critical to the development and implementation of it. It’s a struggle to try and keep the momentum up, to keep the students trained when you don’t have the trained teacher or individual or administrator.

**Personal Growth**

The peer mediators credit the peer mediation program as assisting in their personal growth. Being a mediator exposes them to training and experiences that have made them better people. They come away more confident, with valuable skills and are equipped to provide a special service to the school and the school community. It also improves their speech, their understanding, improves their listening skills and gives them a different outlook to life and people. Many have become very protective of the program. Marvin, for example, was offended when asked, “What is peer mediation doing or not doing for you?” He said:

I will never put mediation in a class to say what it is not doing for me because in all cases and in all aspects of my life where conversation is concerned with both family and friends and total strangers peer mediation has improved my entire quality of speech, it has improved my quality of understanding, it has improved my quality of listening to both sides of a story before jumping frantically to a conclusion or to some kind of a resolution without hearing a second party’s testimony. It has taught me not to judge people but to know what they are before casting judgment on them, so to actually say what has it not done. NO, I CAN’T SAY THAT (raised his voice). I will have to definitely say what it has done and those are the things that it has done.

Peer mediation has helped a number of peer mediators with their academic studies. For example, Marvin was a very shy teenager. Peer mediation has empowered him
and he has become very confident in himself. He credits, as stated above, the peer mediation program for his growth. Likewise, his advisor also notes the new and positive friends that Marvin has met at the peer mediation meetings. This program has made it easy for him to begin believing in himself. He is grateful to the peer mediation program and takes any criticism of the program very personally. He finds life outside of school, without a connection to a peer mediation program, very stifling and difficult. He is not the only peer mediator who feels very strongly committed to the program.

Sherry is also thankful for the many skills that she has acquired through the peer mediation training. She says:

> For me it is doing everything that they told us when they started: to provide us with valuable skills, a service to the school and the members of the school community by trying to help everybody out. That's what it is doing. I just wished we get more public. We would have more cases coming in that we could make solid difference that we could see more actual positive things that we have done. Like the few mediations that we have done we can see and we can say I was able to help things along there. I just wish we wouldn't have to have so many kids out on suspensions for things that they could have talked about and discussed and have it over with a long time ago.

The program has a different impact on each student. Each mediator reflects on something that was personal to him/her. Shirley for example says that:

> Peer mediation helps me listen more, it helps me not to get into that many fights with my friends and stuff; it helps me understand another person's point of view; it gives me the feeling of neutrality, like I don't judge people as much anymore, and it makes me realize that physical violence interrupts, it's not the way to solve anything. It just makes it worse.

Judy has learned more about herself because of the peer mediation program.
She credits the program for making her a better person. She said:

I think what is happening it that it has made me into a better person because I learn more about myself and how I feel about other people. It helps me to be more open, more social and more helpful to other people.

Peer mediation taught Nancy humility. She has gained a different outlook on life because of the peer mediation program. She is concerned that peer mediation “lacks publicity or proper understandings in the schools” because many other students can benefit from the program. She explains her personal gains.

What it is doing for me is that it has given me a different outlook on life and on people and it has given me a better understanding of people. I look at situations more openly. Before I had a tunnel vision and whenever I was in a conflict with somebody I wanted things my way. Now I humble myself just because I understand how people enter conflicts and their mentality. What it is doing is that it is giving me the opportunity to mediate my peers.

The peer mediation program is a very important activity in the daily lives of the peer mediators. They understand the concepts of the program and they organize their lives in accordance with the philosophy of the program. So many of them say that it has made them “a better person.” Bonny was no exception. She maintains:

I definitely think that it has made me a better person. Sometimes when you want to walk away from something you think to yourself “NO.” That is what the peer mediation training will teach you; this is not the way to finish anything.

The peer mediators speak highly of the peer mediation program and tell of the positive impact it has had on their lives. Like Gina, they repeatedly say that it makes them feel more self confident and happy knowing that they can do something for somebody.
Confidence

All the mediators who participated in this study are confident that they can demonstrate or enact the skills taught in training. It seems that their confidence developed because they have presented to various groups and they have experienced the success of peer mediation. Shirley is very confident. She is well trained, experienced and very involved with peer mediation and conflict resolution seminars and workshops within the school community and outside of her school. She says:

I have done a lot of sessions so I guess that I am very confident in peer mediation. I know what I am doing and I know that I can make a difference so I help out to the best of my ability.

June feels the same way because she, too, has been involved with the peer mediation program in her school for more than five years. She mediated many times and like Shirley, she has presented at workshops and seminars. She explains, "I am quite confident. I think that if I had to do mediation right now I am sure that it would probably go on without a hitch." Sherry has been a peer mediator almost as long as June. She has had a fair number of mediations to do because she is attending a very large school where there are daily conflicts. Unlike June, her experience with peer mediation is only from her school exposure to the process yet she is equally confident that she can demonstrate or enact the skills taught in training others. She says:

I could do it now. I'm very confident with the skills. We have been doing it for four years now. I have a few mediations under my belt. I am not afraid to go out and do it.
The students did not get this confidence overnight. They acquired the skills and the confidence by practice. Most of the peer mediators who were interviewed were not involved in any other leadership activities in their school or outside of school. Some have joined other leadership activities since they have joined peer mediation and have acquired even more confidence in themselves. Others are not as confident or are developing confidence. The situation varies. Nancy, for example, says that she is confident that she can demonstrate the skill but she has never mediated. She says:

I am confident in that I know what I need to do, that I know my role and I know the basic process of it but I haven’t mediated a conflict.

I asked Nancy why she had not mediated. She said, “[in] the two situations that I was supposed to mediate, one person showed up and the other person didn’t and they were rescheduled like three or four times afterwards and the same person did not show up. It was always that one person that came.” So, she missed the opportunity to mediate. Marvin is referred to by those mediators who know him well as shy, but he has gradually built his confidence through the peer mediation program. He explains:

Well we had a peer mediation seminar. We had to peer mediate. Actually, I didn’t think that I could do it but there was an elementary school there and we had to put on a demonstration for them and you know after you get into it and you realize that you are teaching little kids how to apply themselves whenever time a conflict arises, you know, and you see that they are sticking on your every word maybe because of the role play or the dramatization that they are witnessing but they are actually hanging on to your every word you actually say. I was the leader for my group. It was actually pretty good. I feel confident that I could apply it any where, any where at any session.

Mediating in public was initially difficult for Marvin but he was put in a position
where he could not refuse to mediate. Under duress, he built his confidence.

Another example that the skill is acquired and that it takes practice is demonstrated by Bonny. She says:

> If I had the book to jog my memory I would be fine. I did do some training and working through the role plays and things like that and that worked out fine. I think that I could do that. I just need the information to kinda brush up, because it’s been about two years.

The peer mediators are very confident about using their peer mediation skills. They are equally convinced that the peer mediation program has built their confidence and changed their lives. They say that they have become “better people.” Do they “Walk their talk”? 

**Relationships**

Most of the peer mediators in this study say that being a peer mediator helps the relationship that they have with their peers, their teachers and their parents. However, one peer mediator feels that the teachers in his school would not accept his use of his peer mediation strategies because they want to hold on to their power/authority over students. He says that parents can also become skeptical. For Nancy, peer mediation helps her relationships with her peers, teachers and parents. She says:

> It helps a great deal. I look at things openly now and I accept their points of view more readily and I understand now where they are coming from. Before I comment or snap back I step back and I just look at the situation from the mediators point of view just as a neutral.

Sherry stresses the value of the communication skills that she leaned at mediation training. For her it is that communication skill that is most helpful with peers,
teachers and parents. She says:

It helps because it is always that communication skills that you learned that help you to listen and how to talk. You always learn the different ways of communication and the type of communication how you talk to other people. You know their tone, maintaining eye contact, it helps a lot to undo all that when you are talking to your teachers, your parents, your peer and everyone.

Bonny had the same response to the question. She, too, feels that the skills of peer mediation helps with communicating with others. “You look someone in the eye, you make eye contacts, making sure of your interest. I use those every day because it is just polite and you learn that it’s just a better way to function, to listen to people, look them in the eye.”

Shirley spoke about the value of understanding different perspectives. The peer mediation program is helping her relationship with her peers, teachers and parents because she can now better understand different perspectives. She explains:

Well it helps me understand their perspectives. I wait to hear both sides of the story before I really can choose anything. It helps me to listen more to them and get their point of view on whatever is going on and helps me not to judge them.

June’s experiences have led her to believe that the peer mediation program is helping her communication with her peers, teachers and her parents too. She speaks of the changes that she has observed in herself. She says:

I think that being a peer mediator helps because since I have been trained and since I have the skills I can apply the skills to different daily problems and conflicts and like I said before, it helps me with my relationships. When I have a problem with someone I just tell them how I feel and it’s very calm confrontation when I go to them and say, “I feel hurt when you say this, I feel you should be acting this way.”
Marvin also says that peer mediation skills are helping him with all his relationships. However, he feels that he is not taken seriously by the adults in his life. His parents will say he is a “nerd” if he speaks with too much maturity and his teachers will say that he has a problem. This is how he explains the position that he finds himself in:

Well it can be broken up into different aspects. Your parents will probably think you are a ‘nerd’ if whenever a problem comes up instead of busting somebody’s ass you are going to step back and talk and you’re this and you’re that. You see with your family it makes you look more mature in their eyes, and I guess that’s actually a good thing there is nothing to be ashamed of you can be immature mentally or physically, you know that’s a good sign. Teachers now, I don’t know how to really categorize it among teachers because teachers tend to relate to it differently. If you have a teacher who thinks that you are too mature for your age, they are probably gonna think probably you have some home problems and you have to do this and you have to do that bla, bla and if you have another teacher that perceives it in a different way you are going to have them come after you in a different way such as, “where did you get that from? You are growing up too fast and this and stuff like that.” It can be perceived by different people in different categories.

There are a number of factors that explain why Marvin thinks this way about the adults in his life. He is from a home where his parent would expect him to apply capital punishment instead of to talk. Also, there are some teachers in the school who do not buy into the program. Yet, Marvin believes that some teachers support peer mediation. He says:

Oh yes, teachers support peer mediation. As long as it helps teachers to actually get their job done, because, believe it or not, most conflicts in schools start in the classroom. If you can have a peer mediator amongst students in the classroom, you can look at the positive steps.

He believes that peer mediation helps him to understand his peers better and that peer mediation provides him with the skills to help his peers do likewise. He claims:

It helped me to understand my peers. Whenever they say something
that I don't agree with instead of jumping down their throats I try to see it from their point of view and if I don't see it from their point of view I voice it to them and then we reason about it.

It seems fair to say that most participants of the study, students, administrators, coordinators and disputants endorse the peer mediation program. They all have positive stories about the program. The parents also support the program (see appendix G).

The strong support for the peer mediation program cuts across certain forms of discrimination. For example, I wondered if gender or race/ethnicity of students related to the impact of the mediation and was told by the coordinators that they are not aware of either being an issue. One administrator who coordinates a program says:

Not that I am aware of. I have asked the students if it matters who mediates in a situation when we had all boys available to mediate all girls mediation. I was surprised that they were shocked that I thought it might have been a problem. I have also had white students mediate with black students conflicts that are all black issues. The students in conflict have never objected. They are usually asked if they feel comfortable with the mediators. I have never had a negative feeling from the students, disputants or mediators based on gender or race/ethnicity.

Despite the glowing reports of the outcomes of the peer mediation programs a minority of the participants want more from the program.

**Satisfaction with the peer mediation process**

All the participants speak favourably about the peer mediation process. However, they are at varied levels of satisfaction because of their different exposures to the peer mediation program or because of how they use the program in their school. Some peer mediators describe the peer mediation program as
complete. They are very satisfied with it because it gives them a “voice”, freedom, and empowerment. The disputants appreciate the process because it worked for them. Others believe that the program is capable of accomplishing more if it is given the opportunity to do so. They say that the program needs to be expanded in schools and they are dissatisfied with the under-utilization of peer mediation in schools. Administrators, who are coordinators, are most critical of the under-utilization of the peer mediation program because they train the peer mediators, they believe in the program and they know that the peer mediators can make a positive difference to the school climate, but the voices of those who are satisfied are more vocal.

Some students believe that the peer mediation process covers all areas of a conflict. June, for instance, believes that the peer mediation process is “complete.” She explains:

I am satisfied with the mediation process because I feel that it is very complete. It goes through each stage and the relationship with two people and it’s very thorough because it doesn’t leave anything out. You have to get through it before you can have the solution to the problem.

Shirley is also satisfied with the peer mediation process because it includes everything that peer mediators need. She says, “So far, it has solved the conflicts that have arisen. There have not been any problems with it and we didn’t need to add anything onto it. We have got basically everything that we need.” Sherry’s satisfaction with the peer mediation process is based on the liberation that the process gives. She says:

It gives freedom and also guidelines because mediators really have a lot of control on how things should be. You can be very strict and be very rigid and demand, “You got to this, you got to do that” or you can let things
flow as they tumble out of each person and you can pick up on those little things and go with them. As well the disputants, they do have a say and they can bring up certain aspects. It's (mediation is) flexible right now in the way it's going and I love the fact that we have an agreement and we can always hold it up and say, "Wait a sec. You promised that you would not be doing this and now you are. That's wrong, you agreed that you wouldn't be doing that and if you broke the agreement, you said that you would do this." So, it really does provide a lot of closure. You can always see something come out of it. It may not be what you want to see happen but it is not your case. It is these two disputants so you will see something happen and the fact that we go over the dialogue and make the disputants comfortable. But we also give them the ground rules to say hey, you can do pretty much what you want but you can't start blaming and yelling and name calling. You got to do this but do talk and address each other and say. "I feel that you did this so it becomes very personal and very student directed and its disputants and back and forth between the two disputants not the disputants talking through us to say, "Ok, ok, come on my side tell me I'm right, tell her she's wrong. It's you who have done this, ok, I agree that I have done this but it's between the disputants." It's their conflict, that's what I like about mediation. it brings it back to them and what they want to do with this.

A coordinator of the program says that the peer mediators are very satisfied with the process because once they become a mediator they remain one until they retire from the school community. This is how she explains it:

The mediators are great. Once we have someone in as a mediator they usually stick around until they finish OACS. They like the program. They are really quick to find us and say we are getting an awful lot of this and that, can we have a workshop on that? So, we address ongoing issues because it changes. The disputants don't always like it (peer mediation) but they like it a whole lot more than dealing with the VPs and or suspension so it's the best of two evils and the ones that don't like it make sure that they don't ever, ever have to come to mediation again. So for whatever reason we don't see them again whether it is because they like us or they don't, the success is there.

The administrators who are coordinators were asked about the satisfaction of the peer mediators from their perspective. One administrator who has coordinated three different programs, reflects on the reactions of the peer mediators in her school.

The students (peer mediators) tell me that they feel empowered and useful to their peers and to the school community. They are very satisfied with the new knowledge and expertise that they have acquired
as peace makers because the skills are transferable. They are using the
skills gained from the training and from their experiences to solve problems
among their friends, their siblings, their teachers and their parents.
They are happy campers.

She says that the disputants feel that they have discovered a new skill. They
respect, she says, what they see the mediators do in the mediation process and
often, after their exposure to the process (as disputants), they become mediators.
She believes that most disputants are relieved that their conflicts were solved
peacefully and that they have saved a relationship. Another administrator/coordinator from a large school also believes that the peer mediators
are satisfied. They are low keyed in his school. He said:

I believe they are satisfied. Again there are not a lot of disclosure
around their glee or disappointment with it. Sometimes no news is
good news. So, I would say in the long run, it's satisfactory.

Nevertheless, I know that some peer mediators are dissatisfied with peer mediation.
Usually, they find the peer mediation program too demanding on their time. Instead,
they offered to mediate only when there was a shortage of mediators to meet the
needs of the mediation program. They also stopped attending mediation meetings.
The other half of the participants believe in the peer mediation process but they
have problems with its use. They believe that it has the potential for further growth
but the lack of implementation in most schools is preventing its progress.

Dissatisfaction with Peer Mediation in Schools

Nancy says that she is satisfied with the peer mediation process, but she
thinks that there is scope for growth. Bonny criticizes the language because she
says that the terminology of mediation “needs some work.” Marvin, on the other
hand, sees the value of peer mediation and criticizes the lack of expansion of the
peer mediation process in schools. He says:

I would like to see it (peer mediation) expand. I think it’s too good a program to be as it is and I’ll tell you why. I would like to see it go further, people using it more. People using the techniques among themselves, teachers, friends instead of jumping to the first act of violence you can think of. Every time a problem does arise, I think you should actually think logically before you act. That is peer mediation. I think that is the whole process of peer mediation. Think logically before you act and think logically before you judge, think logically before you make decisions. Schools should definitely promote peer mediation because peer mediation has helped me. It has helped me to converse and act at the level of adolescence and the level of superiority because I can argue with a ten-month old baby yet I can talk to the president of the United States if I had to.

Others are also dissatisfied with the mediation process in schools. They are dissatisfied with the limited use of the peer mediation programs in schools and the slow progress to implement the programs in other schools. Where it is implemented, it is not used sufficiently and little importance is given to it. Some adults, in particular, are dissatisfied with the limited use of the peer mediation programs in schools because they see its potential to do more. One administrator had the following to say:

I am not satisfied with our program because I know that it could do more. The reason I say that is because I would like it to be doing more and be more available for people but it needs to get staff, students and community together to enunciate its worth and place a high value on it and that is almost physically impossible in this community.

This administrator/coordinator is referring to the volume of work that the administrators have in this very large multicultural school community. The challenges are many and it is difficult for an administrator to wear both hats at the same time in a school community where there are daily incidents (often violent) and so the promotion, maximization and use of the peer mediation program seem truly impossible to accomplish. Another administrator/coordinator is in the same situation
and she speaks with extreme disappointment with the slow progress of the implementation of peer mediation in schools. She says:

I am very satisfied with the peer mediation process but I am extremely disappointed with the progress of conflict resolution and peer mediation in schools, not just my school. I am not sure that most administrators and others who are in position of responsibility, especially policy makers, know or understand the power of mediation. Their lack of knowledge about the process is causing the program to be under utilized. So, while I am satisfied that the process of mediation is great, I am not satisfied with the present structure of the program in schools. This program should be an integral part of the education of students. Let’s face it, conflict is inevitable but violence is not. How are we using mediation to help prevent violence? Or are we using it for political reasons: lip service only, just being on paper that we have a program? I am very disappointed with the shortsightedness of those who could make a difference to its implementation.

The mediators, and the disputants in particular, are satisfied with the peer mediation process. Some adults are satisfied to a point but most adults and some mediators want to see the program more recognized and better established because they believe that it can benefit the school communities. All the coordinators interviewed seem very committed to the peer mediation program although most are not satisfied with the present level of the development of the program in their school.

**Underdeveloped and Underutilized Programs**

The peer mediation program is not equally developed, accepted and fully utilized in every school. Bonny and Nancy believe that peer mediation, if given the chance, can make an impact on the school climate, but they did not experience that happening in their school. Bonny said that while she hoped that peer mediation would resolve problems, it was not happening because students did not know about the program.
Well, the effects I hope for mediation to have is either to go to the adults for mediation or come to us. That would be the ideal. Right now it's not really happening. All students need to know that mediation is there for them if they needed it.

Nancy also spoke of the lack of publicity about peer mediation and the problem with the way peer mediators were used. In her school they do not have a formalized peer mediation program. Students who were trained as peer mediators are solving problems on their own among their friends.

It (the school) had a peer mediation program in the sense that the trained mediators were doing, like myself, solving small problems among their peers. It has somewhat of an impact but as an impact that can be seen by looking at school statistics like people that were suspended, then there wouldn't be a chance just because the conflicts that we were solving among our peers were not valid. So, the conflict would not have made it to the administrative bodies so those same people who were being suspended would continue to be suspended because their problems were not being mediated. The mediation that was happening between me and my friends, I didn't sit them down and say, "I'll solve your problems." I did it. I talked to other mediators and they commented that they were doing the same thing. For major disputes to be settled they would have to notify the office first and the office would notify the mediators but none of us were being notified about anything.

Nancy believes that conflicts that eventually got the attention of the administrators were solved. Those conflicts, according to Nancy, "Did not have much impact because what the office gave the mediators to solve only happened for three or four weeks and the conflicts that did get to the office people did not show." Nancy had some strong views about the lack of use of the peer mediators in her school. She said, "the secondary schools that have trained mediators can start putting them to use. There are probably a lot of high schools, considering I have been through two, that have trained mediators that are not being utilized." She also sees the lack of
support for the peer mediation coming from some teachers and some administrators because "mediation is solving problems that teachers and the administrators cannot solve".

Summary

This chapter discusses the outcomes of the peer mediation program. The participants shared the impact of the program on their school climate and on the peer mediators. Each of the three categories - the students, administrators and coordinators of the program share similar views. They all said that peer mediation has a positive impact on the school climate especially in the areas of suspension and that it assists in the reduction of conflicts between students and fights. They also suggest that the classroom and the school environment became a more peaceful place for teaching and learning. Those involved in the program, peer mediators, credit the program for their personal growth, for helping them develop life-long skills and especially for developing their leadership skills. However, many are disappointed with the underutilization of the program and the lack of support that the peer mediation program experienced.

In one school in this study the peer mediation program is working in Partnership with the Juvenile Justice System to help young offenders avoid the court system. Mediation is the focus of this program and the program allows the offenders to make choices about the incident that they are involved in. Offenders also have the opportunity to end the police involvement at an early stage by choosing mediation.
Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCIDENT</th>
<th>1-2 DAYS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REPORT TO SCHOOL OFFICIALS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIATION SCREENING COMMITTEE</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Call Police for Input)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

NO CHARGE

2-3 WEEKS

CHARGE

MEDIATION

(Charge Pending)

COURT

NO RESOLUTION

AGREEMENT

NO RESOLUTION

AGREEMENT

COURT

COURT

MONITORING AGREEMENT

WITHIN 4 MONTHS

NON-COMPLIANCE w/n 4 MONTHS

FULFILLED

RETURN TO MEDIATION TO CLARIFY

CHARGE

NO FURTHER ACTION

FULFILLED

WITHDRAW CHARGES

COURT

EXTENSION FOR COMPLETION

WITHDRAW CHARGE

Source: Justice for Children and Youth, Toronto.
CHAPTER 9
DISCUSSION

This study investigates the practice and the impact of peer mediation in secondary schools. Specifically, I looked at the peer mediation process through the eyes of the peer mediators of eight secondary schools. This chapter summarizes the findings of the investigation. In my attempt to understand and explain my findings, themes will be analyzed and supplemented by research in the field of conflict resolution and peer mediation as well as other relevant literature. I begin with a summary of the themes followed by the findings.

The Conceptual Framework (Table 2) captures the essence of the themes. They are pre-mediation, referral and organization, mediation and outcomes of the peer mediation process. However, two other areas were explored in order to better understand the peer mediation process in secondary schools. The first is the participants' understanding of the concept peer mediation and the second is the goals of the program.

THESIS FINDINGS

This research on Peer Mediation in Secondary Schools is the first of its kind. Therefore, it is not always possible to give equal treatment to all the themes because in some cases there is no research available. Nevertheless, every attempt is made to provide readers with the literature that best provides additional information about the peer mediation process. The discussion that follows describes the participants' understanding of peer mediation, goals of peer mediation and the
peer mediation process. It is not a universal declaration for the peer mediation process, but the reflection of the values, feelings and emotions of only thirty-three people who are intimately involved with the peer mediation program in their school community. They speak only for their program based on their experiences. The participants had nothing negative to say about the peer mediation process, but that does not mean that peer mediation is seen universally as a positive process. Therefore, the discussion also presents, very briefly, the views of some critics of the process. The criticisms are discussed in light of the findings of the study. I have provided supporting research and literature that will help readers to understand the findings. The final discussion focuses on the four new findings.

**What is Peer Mediation?**

The findings reveal that all the participants have some understanding of the concept of peer mediation. They describe peer mediation as a program or a method of helping others to solve their problems peacefully; resolving a conflict before it gets out of control; talking and making peace. These findings are in keeping with the research on conflict resolution in schools.

Peer mediation is reported by Brown (1995) as a useful alternative for students in conflict. The students, teachers, and administrators in his study say that they see the peer mediation program serving as an option for students to deal with conflicts, instead of traditional disciplinary action or the continuation of the conflict. This is in keeping with the findings of Rintoul (1999). She says that the teachers at Bishop’s Gate attributed much of its decrease in the level of aggressive behaviour
directly to their Peer Mediation programme. Although no other research besides mine gives peer mediators a direct "voice," mediators are speaking out in the literature about their perception of peer mediation and its value to them.

The voices of the Peer Mediators in Newark and New Jersey help to validate my findings about how peer mediators perceive the process. One grade 11 peer mediator of Malcolm X Shabazz School says, "Mediation means that you can solve problems without fighting and listening to both sides" (Conflict Mediation Program of Malcolm X Shabazz School, 1997, p. 10). Another grade 11 student explains what conflict resolution means to her. She says, "Conflict resolution caused me to realize that fighting doesn't prove anything. It is better to work things out through communication. Also, I see that things aren't always as bad as they might seem during a given moment" (p. 10). As early as grade 5 student mediators understand the process. One such mediator from St. Bridget School in New Jersey says, "Mediation to me means learning to work out problems by talking not fighting. It means people get along with each other. It also means to stop the violence" (NIDR, 1997, p. 13). In addition, the literature also supports my findings that peer mediation does not only resolve conflicts but it also creates opportunities for students to talk and promote peace. An example is the "peaceable school" model (Lantieri & Patti, 1996). It promotes a problem-solving approach to daily conflicts. Lantieri and Patti (1996, p. 29) describe the program as follows:

Our school operates on the premise that, here, we talk about our problems: we don't shove them under the table. People tend to respect one another, value diversity, and hold fewer negative
stereotypes. There are strong sanctions against violence and bias-related incidents. And, finally, teachers, students, and staff share power: a democratic environment fosters the development of social and civil responsibility.

This model includes all the themes of the participants of my study: talking, problem-solving and making peace. What peer mediation means to students is best summarized by a grade 12 student from Malcolm X Shabazz School. He says, “Being a peer mediator is a very pleasurable feeling. Knowing that you can help facilitate a minor problem from turning into a major one is without regards the best feeling in my life” (p. 11). This statement supports both the findings in my study, the research in the field and current literature about what the concept “peer mediation” means to students and what they perceive the peer mediation process to be doing.

GOALS OF PEER MEDIATION

The participants of the study identify a variety of goals for the peer mediation program. These goals range from making school a place of peace to preventing violence. The participants identified twelve different goals. They are getting people to talk about their feelings; resolving disputes/conflicts; instilling the habit of thinking before acting; having students take ownership of their problems; promoting peaceful, harmonious, safe and better schools; providing co-curricular activities; providing a re-entry after suspension; teaching students how to resolve problems in the future; preventing violence; helping people to be more open; learning problem-solving skills and learning listening skills. Some of these findings are special to this study because they have not been investigated. For example using
peer mediation as a re-entry plan after a suspension. However, some information is available about some of the other themes. For instance, the literature verifies the goals of peer mediation to get people to talk about their feelings and to be more open. Support comes from When Talk Works: Profiles of Mediators (Kolb and Associates, 1994). This work provides evidence that mediators are successfully using talk (mediation) to resolve difficult world issues.

Another recurring goal of the participants is to learn problem-solving skills. They have created a Train-the-Trainers model with the hope that the trained peer mediators will in turn train their peers who want to become peer mediators (see Train-the-Trainers model Table 6). This is new information for the field of conflict resolution because the method has also not been previously investigated. However, The National Institute For Dispute Resolution has provided recommended standards for School-Based Peer Mediation Programs encouraging training for different levels of trainers. They support the training model of my study.

Studies validated my finding that peer mediation and conflict programs are used to prevent violence. Kmita (1997) says that Wilson-Brewer, Cohen, O'Donnell and Goodman (1991) conducted a survey of fifty-one programs that used some form of conflict resolution as a basis for violence prevention. Anticoli's (1997) study on School Violence Intervention: The Role of Peer Mediation in Diminishing Disputant Recidivism concluded that "peer mediation process is one step in an attempt to lessen the violence among young people" (p. 90). The literature in the field also supports my finding that the goal of peer mediation process is to prevent
violence. Morse and Ivey (1996) say that mediation is a key option to violence prevention programs. They describe peer mediation as one of the most promising avenues in schools for resolving conflicts peacefully and offering alternatives to violence. As a result peer mediation is mandated in some states like Illinois.

**PRE-MEDIATION**

Peer mediation is becoming popular in schools and in society. However, not everyone is suitable for a mediator's role because it requires a lot of commitment and dedication to the program to make it work. As a result, the selection of the students is extremely important.

**Selection**

The schools employed three methods to select peer mediators. One method was that they were hand picked by the coordinators or teachers. The second was nomination by their peers, teachers or self-nominated and the third was volunteering themselves for the program. All three methods are supported by research and the literature.

Cunningham's (1997) study also found that students are handpicked to be trained as peer mediators. However, in his research the main criteria for the selection of mediators was staff judgments based on the suitability for the program. The second method found in my study, the selection by staff and students, is supported by the Illinois Institute and by Schrumpf, Crawford and Bodine (1997) and the third method, volunteering, is supported by Cunningham's (1997) study. Cunningham (1997) found that 83% of surveyed schools asked the students to
volunteer to be mediators. Unfortunately, there are no comparisons in the literature or research which suggest the best method of selection. Furthermore, in almost all evaluations, summaries and reviews of specific programs little or no information is given as to why the chosen selection method was employed (Cordasco, 1996). Nevertheless, there are advantages and disadvantages associated with each method.

The Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution suggests that nominations be broadly solicited from staff and students, including self-nomination but they believe that one of the most effective methods is lottery (Crawford & Bodine, 1996; Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). They say that selection by lottery is preferred because interested students will take the risk of applying when they do not fear rejection and that the lottery selection is perceived as an opportunity, whereas selection by criteria can be perceived as a personal risk. They believe, too, that a student who is rejected as a peer mediator may reject the mediation process if he or she experiences a conflict. This attitude can spread from one individual to groups of peers who may also refuse to participate in the process. Based on their description of how the lottery works, it appears that one disadvantage to the lottery is that it must provide for the proper representation of the school’s diverse groups, like race and gender, for it to work well. The system is a “controlled lottery” or several lotteries (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). On the other hand, Cordasco (1996) says that an in-depth review of literature specific to the selection of peer mediators in schools reveals that the two most common methods of
selection utilized in most programs were either some form of application and interview or sociometric selection (peer selection). Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine (1997) support the research of Cordasco. The advantages of both methods are that peers select peers, an open invitation is given to all students and individuals can identify those persons who they feel possess certain distinguishing characteristics and who they would prefer working with in a given situation (Cordasco, 1996). In addition, since peers turn first to their peers for help, Cordasco (1996) sees the advantage of identifying the natural leaders of each group and training them in the desired skill. Also, when students have the opportunity to apply or nominate other students for the program two things happen. First, students feel ownership of the program from the outset and second, it is likely that peers will name some students who would not otherwise be identified (Schrumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1997).

**Training**

Each school in my study has a team of advisors consisting of an administrator, teachers, and non-teaching staff or a combination of the three categories. The coordinators of the program and experts in the field train the students to become peer mediators. The initial training took place at the School Board office. They used a Train-the-Trainer model (see Table 6). The coordinators of the programs in my study say that students need 15 to 20 hours of training before they begin to mediate and the Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution program for student mediation training involves 12 to 15 hours of basic training and 12 to 15 hours of additional advanced training (Crawford and Bodine, 1996)
The eight schools in my study had four different approaches to the training of the peer mediators (see Table 7). Five schools teach the peer mediation process, one uses a conflict resolution text, and a third emphasizes perception. Some schools taught a combination of the peer mediation process and other skills. The current research supports my findings.

Jones’ (1997) research found that there are two types of peer mediation training. One is for peer mediators only (cadre programs) and the other is for peer mediation plus (whole school program). However, the training method was the same. In the case of the peer mediation (cadre programs) the students in the middle and high schools needed 20-30 hours of training to qualify as peer mediators and their training is completed in four weeks or less. Another similarity to the programs in my study is that Jones (1997) also found that each school had a site leadership team consisting of 4 or 5 adults with at least one teacher, one non-teaching staff member and (where possible) one administrator. One school in my study uses a text to teach the students conflict resolution skills and that program has some similarity with the curriculum infusion training of the peer mediation plus (whole school program) because they too use a standardized curriculum. The Canadian research done by Cunningham (1997) is even more in keeping with my findings.

Cunningham (1997) found, like I did, that the average training time for all schools was 13.2 hours. However, secondary schools averaged 16.2 hours of training. He also found that secondary schools in his study use Board experts, teachers and community experts to train the peer mediators. Published manuals are
used by 61% of participants in his study, 26% used both unpublished manuals and their own model, 38% used more than 2 manuals and 11% used their own model only. Unfortunately, the literature does not address the pros and cons of manuals or locally developed models, but based on my experiences in the field, I believe that locally developed models best meet the individual needs of the school community as opposed to manuals that may or may not address the issues that the community faces.

REFERRAL AND ORGANIZATION

Conflicts are referred to mediation in three main ways. Students may be referred by completing a referral form or submitting their names in a referral book (left in the classrooms) or by self referral. However, except for one school, all referrals to mediation must be approved by an administrator. The administrators say that this practise is adapted at the request of the teacher advisors of the program.

Only student/student conflicts are sent to peer mediation. These conflicts range from verbal fights to physical fights, but misunderstandings, rumours, girlfriend/boyfriend conflicts and racially motivated conflicts are most common. Violent incidents are not sent to mediation because they are usually referred to the police to handle. When students fight, they are suspended and on their return to school they are usually referred to mediation so that they can put some closure to the conflict. The fights mediated are those that do not cause harm to others. Each conflict follows a specific process (see table 8).

The conflict first goes to the administrators. The students are given the
choice to go to mediation or to be suspended. In some cases an alternative consequence to suspension may be given. This could be a detention or an in-school withdrawal. In situations where mediation is unsuccessful, the conflict is returned to the administrators who will give the students a traditional consequence.

Mediation is not always successful. The participants report that although peer mediation seems to resolve many of these problems, certain problems do not get resolved by peer mediation. For example, conflicts which started outside of school may not get resolved by a school-based peer mediation program because the students involved may not all attend that school. Also, they find that in cases where disputants decide they are not going to resolve the conflict or when all the facts are not brought out or when both disputants have repeatedly had problems with each other and simply cannot get along, problems do not get resolved by peer mediation. However, when disputants agree to bring their disputes to mediation the conflicts are usually solved. Anticoli (1997), for example, observed that about two to three disputants who attended peer mediation had no further major disciplinary problems. However, those who did have further problems had a history of ongoing violent, antisocial behaviour, for the most part. The literature provides proof that mediation is successfully resolving some of these conflicts caused by antisocial behaviour. The research also supports my findings.

The researchers also found that a wide variety of disputes are referred to mediation. They include physical fights, verbal disagreements, rumour, disputes over property and money. Jones (1997) says that referrals to mediation in her
study, came from a variety of sources. They were teachers, students, administrators, counsellors, disciplinarians and by the parties themselves. My study has provided a new source - using a referral book. The students anonymously write the names of their peers who they think are in conflict and need the help of the mediation process or their personal request for mediation. This may be very beneficial to resolving conflicts before they get into fully blown conflicts, as well as giving the adults information about an upcoming conflict or unresolved conflicts. The process was not abused or used as a prank in that school. Several teachers noted in Brown's (1995) report that teachers could see only a proportion of student behaviour in the school, but often did not see the continuation of the conflicts afterwards. The referral book may be useful to report some of these cases to the school administration. Brown (1995) also found that peer mediation relies on vice-principal referrals. In addition, he learned that all three groups of participants (students, teachers and administrators) say that verbal disputes about rumour and gossip occur most frequently. However, race/racial issues are also a cause of conflicts. On the other hand, Ellen Nottingham Washington Middle School says that requests for mediation come routinely from teachers, counsellors, administrators and best of all students (Ellen Nottingham Washington Middle School, 1997). These are the four sources of referral in my study.

MEDIATION

The peer mediators and their coordinators do a lot of preparation before the actual mediation. For instance, they must speak with the disputants before the
mediation to ensure that they voluntarily agree to go to mediation. The coordinator may have to give a brief history of the conflict to the mediators to help them mentally prepare for the session. In addition, a private room must be acquired and chairs must be set up in a special arrangement to facilitate open communication between all the parties.

I discovered from the research that there are five steps to the mediation process. They are the Introduction, Getting the Facts, Verification of the Facts, Brainstorming for Solutions and the Agreement (see summary of peer mediation process). During the mediation the mediators first introduce themselves, explaining the process and the ground rules. Second, they share their stories and each disputant paraphrases what the other says. Third, the mediators verify the facts of the incident by asking what happened, why and when. They usually ask the disputants how they felt when the incident happened. The fourth stage is brainstorming for ways to improve the situation and the fifth stage is the signing of the agreement. However, if a student refuses mediation, the conflict is returned to an administrator who will assign a traditional consequence to the students. The options vary according to the severity of the consequence. It may be a detention or suspension or outside agencies like the police and Youth Services may be contacted. Although no other research has been conducted on the peer mediation process in secondary schools certain practices exist that can support some of my findings.

The mediation process used in the schools studied is similar to Moore’s
(1996) mediator process and the Peer Mediation in the Schools program of Morse and Andrea (1994). For example Morse and Andrea's (1994) mediation model also has five steps: opening, listening, mutual understanding, creating options and planning. The process of mediating is the same as I discovered from my investigation.

**OUTCOMES**

According to the participants, peer mediation has had a positive effect on the schools in my study. The findings demonstrate the positive effects of the program to the school climate, peer mediators, disputants, non-disputants, teachers and the administrators.

**School Climate**

My study found that the peer mediation program affects the school climate in a positive way. The participants say that peer mediation teaches listening skills, accountability, reduces suspension and gives an opportunity for students to voice their own opinion. As a result the study finds that peer mediation helps students to take ownership for their own problems; mediators accept leadership roles and work in partnership with their peers to develop resolutions to their conflicts. The program has created opportunities for peaceful classrooms and provides teachers with a place to send disputants to have their conflicts resolved. Therefore, teachers can concentrate on teaching. Because it helps some conflicts from getting to the point of suspension, the study found that the peer mediation program has a tremendous and lasting effect on the school climate. The participants express the general
improvement in their school climate in terms of students and teachers feeling safer.

The research in the field supports these findings about the positive effect of peer mediation programs on the school climate.

Jones (1997), in her study, found that peer mediation programs significantly improve school climate. She says

Peer mediation programs had a significant and sustained impact on teacher and staff perceptions of school climate for both cadre and whole school programs and in all educational levels. Peer mediation programs had a limited to moderate impact on students’ perceptions of climate (p. 7).

The report of the Metis Associates (1990) states that peer mediation has an observable positive impact on the classroom and school climates. The behaviours and attitudes of participating children were positively affected by the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program and the mediation programs have been successful in fostering more peaceful class and school environments. The respondents (81%) reported that they noticed positive changes to class climate which they attributed to the teaching of the conflict resolution curriculum. The program also had an impact on the teachers because 86% of the teachers indicated that they had noticed changes in their own attitudes and behaviours. Teachers said that as a result of their participation, they listened better to children and had more positive attitudes toward conflict and the possibilities for resolving conflicts in mutually satisfactory ways.

The findings from the three-year Demonstration Project in Ohio used an independent evaluator to conduct confidential interviews with students, teachers,
counselors, principals and parents to identify benefits like school climate. They found that school climate improves with the introduction of peer mediation. One student said, "Mediation really changed our school a lot, there are fewer fights. I hope to continue mediating in middle school" (Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management, 1996, p. 13). A teacher remarked that students are mediating on their own and that "there is also a whole emphasis in the school on mediation and conflict resolution reflected in the curriculum which has contributed to changing the general atmosphere of the school (p. 13)." Overall, they believe that the information indicated that most students improved their attitudes toward conflict, increased their understanding of non-violent problem solving methods, and enhanced their communication skills which improved the school climate. These findings support my report that peer mediation has a positive effect on the school climate.

**Value to Peer Mediators**

In my study the peer mediators speak about the positive effects that the peer mediation program has on their personal lives, confidence and relationships. The peer mediators say that the program has changed their lives, taught them the differences between doing what is right and what is wrong, makes them realize that physical violence interrupts and is not the way to solve anything, improves their listening and communication skills, helps them to understand different perspectives, provides them with valuable skills and makes them a better person. They also learn more about themselves and how they feel about other people. One mediator says
that she humbles herself because she understands now how people enter conflicts and their mentality. The influence of the program is expressed by a student who says that she definitely thinks that the program has made her a better person. As a result of the influence of the program when she wants to walk away from something, she reminds herself that walking away is not the way to resolve a problem. Another student says that the program makes her feel more confident about herself and that she can do something for somebody.

The study found that the peer mediation program helps peer mediators with their relationships with their peers, teachers and their parents. It helps them to understand their peers and they use the skills daily to help them to better communicate - specially with their teachers and their parents. One peer mediator says that she looks at things differently now and she accepts the point of view of her parents more readily because she understands where they are coming from. The communication skills also teach them how to listen, talk and control their tone of voice and the value of eye contact. I found the peer mediators were willing to listen to both sides of a story and were less likely to judge others.

The research supports my findings that the peer mediation program is very valuable to the peer mediators. Jones (1997) says, “The data clearly demonstrate that exposure to peer mediation reduces personal conflicts and increases the tendency to help others with conflicts, increases pro-social values, decreases aggressiveness, and increases perspective-taking and conflict competence. Especially for peer mediators, these impacts are significant, cumulative, and are
sustained for long periods” (p. 5-6). The three-year Demonstration Project (Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management, 1996) is one of the largest ever undertaken in school conflict resolution research and their findings also support mine. Overall, they report that the information that they acquired indicate that most students improved their attitudes toward conflict, increased their understanding of non-violent problem solving methods and enhanced their communication skills. In addition, they found that mediators’ attitudes were also affected. They were more willing to stop a fight, less likely to think people deserved to be beaten up and that they gained increased confidence in their ability to help themselves and others solve problems. The literature also supports these and my findings about the value of the process to students.

Bush and Folger (1994) argue that mediation does more than create agreements and improve relationships. It has the potential to transform peoples’s lives, increase their sense of personal efficacy (empowerment) and increased their sense of openness to and acceptance (recognition) of others. This is how the peer mediators in my study describe the value of peer mediation to them. On the other hand, some argue that the positive effects of the peer mediation program are due to the fact that the students are a part of the safe school solution. Hill (1996) believes that students are a valuable resource in promoting a safe school climate and that their participation in safe schools’ initiative leads to long-term benefits and fosters healthy interpersonal relationships that will assist them for the rest of their lives. Peer mediation can be a part of the safe school initiative and peer mediators
help to improve school discipline. Furtwengler (1996) also supports the value of student involvement. He advocates that there will be improved discipline in secondary schools by involving students in the process. This is in keeping with the value of the peer mediators to the school climate.

The findings from student leaders' involvement in his program revealed five things. Students learned how to talk with teachers and administrators about school problems and activities; students and teachers, working together, learned how to confront relevant and often difficult aspects of school life; students learned to work as a community of learners and leaders; students learned how to get things done in organizations and students learned to assume adult roles and to view school activities from the teachers' perspectives. These findings are in keeping with the effects of the peer mediation program on the peer mediators.

Peer mediation has a positive effect on students' behaviour and discipline. Ellsworth (1993) investigated "Middle School Students Learning Language for Conflict Resolution in a Community in Conflict: A Book of Lessons or a Way of Being?" One of his conclusions was that students who learn conflict resolution acquire skills to take responsibility for conflict in their own lives and a better understanding of conflict in society. Maxwell (1989) also contributes to the dialogue about the impact of peer mediation on student behaviour and discipline. She says that mediation programs provide students with critical practice in decision making and self-discipline and it requires the disputants to take responsibility for their conflict in order to reach a settlement. She describes the process of mediation as
self-empowering because it enables the students to make decisions about issues and conflicts that affect their own lives, enables them to engage in productive decision making themselves, as opposed to having the decision imposed on them, and provides them with a forum to resolve interpersonal disputes that are often left unresolved by traditional disciplinary measures (p. 151). These were also the findings expressed by participants in my study. In addition, she describes mediation as having a self-empowering aspect because disputants participate and make decisions about issues and problems that are central to their own lives, therefore establishing mediation as an important tool in the fostering of self-regulation, self-esteem and self-discipline. When students have a forum for the resolution of conflicts and are empowered to self-govern and self-regulate their lives the student behaviour and discipline improve. Self-regulation describes a person’s ability to generate socially approved behaviour in the absence of external monitors (p. 149).

This approach to peer mediation supports my findings.

My study found that the disputants are also positively affected by the peer mediation process. Participants in my study perceive the process to bring love to the school community and to their lives because when there is a problem, they say there are peer mediators to help them resolve the conflicts. They see the value in talking with the peer mediators to help them resolve their problems (see appendix H). The disputants express the turmoil in their lives and the aggression that they and their peers experienced before mediation: yelling, fighting and lots of violence. They appreciate the peace. Their reactions to the peer mediators as a resource for
peaceful resolution when they have a problem is very similar to the findings of Kolan’s (1999) research on disputants’ response to conflicts. Kolan (1999) investigated perceptions from high school disputants in an ethnically diverse suburban public school system on the short-term impact of the peer mediation process. The disputants found the process helpful. They think the agreements are fair, and they would use it again in the future (Kolan, 1999, p. 129). The disputants think peer mediation is helpful to them because they are able to talk to one another, they listen to each other, the mediators help them to see new ways to solve a problem and the mediation provides an option. Rather than fight peer mediation provides an opportunity for them to see mistakes in the relationship (Kolan, 1999, p. 87), to talk and to problem-solve. In speaking with the non-disputants I found that they also feel a sense of security that the program is in place for those who need it so that their lives in the classrooms, halls, cafeteria and the school in general can be peaceful.

The findings also reveal that the teachers appreciate peaceful classrooms. They can only see benefits from the program and they encourage its implementation. They see the reduction in school violence, fights, racial tensions and the positive effects on school discipline as a whole. They are grateful that they have a place to send students in conflict when they are teaching. The Ohio School Conflict Management Demonstration Project 1990-1993 (1996) supports the views of the teachers in my study. They report the reduction in violence. One teacher in their study says, “With student conflict managers teachers don’t have to spend as
much time acting like a cop. It frees up more time to teach” (p. 14). They also talked about the value of the skills that they gained from the program to their teaching and their lives.

I found that the administrators believe that there would have been more suspensions if there was not peer mediation in their school. They say that the program is definitely positive, suspensions are down, there are fewer fights and instead of using the fist and verbal abuse to settle disputes, students are facing each other and talking about their differences. They also notice the positive effects that the program has on the self esteem, confidence, discipline, caring, cooperativeness and willingness to serve other. The research supports my findings.

Johnson & Johnson (1994) found from their studies that students trained in mediation engaged in less antisocial and more prosocial behaviour in schools. Violence and other serious discipline problems decreased and referrals to the principal were reduced by about 60%. This is in keeping with my findings of the impact that peer mediation has on teachers' classrooms, student behaviour and discipline. In my study this was most noticeable in the student who was a disputant but later became a peer mediator. The impact on teachers' classrooms is further supported by Final Report of the School Conflict Management Demonstration Project 1990 - 1993 (Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management, 1996).

The impact on student behaviour and discipline is very well documented. Jones (1997) found that peer mediation programs provide significant benefit in
developing constructive social and conflict behaviour in children at all educational levels which helps administrators to manage schools. They say

It is clear that exposure to peer mediation programs, whether cadre or whole school, has a significant and lasting impact on students’ conflict attitudes and behaviours. Students who are direct recipients of program training have the most impact, however, students without direct training also benefit. The data clearly demonstrate that exposure to peer mediation reduces personal conflict and increases the tendency to help others with conflicts, increases pro-social values, decreases aggressiveness, and increases perspective-taking and conflict competence. Especially for peer mediators, these impacts are significant, cumulative, and are sustained for long periods. Students trained in mediation, at all educational levels, are able to enact and utilize the behavioral skills taught in training (p. 5).

Anticoli’s (1997) research analyzed the effectiveness of the peer mediation program in an urban secondary school. The goal was to determine whether the peer mediation process quelled their disputes and whether or not the process taught them skills to avoid future disputes. The results of the study showed that peer mediation is most effective in settling minor disputes between students before they reach the physical fighting stage which would normally result in an out-of-school suspension for the students. Four administrators said that peer mediation kept the time-consuming “he said/she said” disputes out of their offices so that they could concentrate on more pressing matters.

Some critics say that the peer mediation process has flaws. They criticize the concepts of active listening (Duryea, 1996) as a gimmick; they are suspicious of mediators reframing the language of the disputants (Lam, Rifkin and Townley, 1989; Kiely and Cray, 1986); they question the representation that disputants are receiving through the mediators (Garcia, 1995); they distrust the power dynamics of the mediators over the disputants (Cormick et al, 1996; Kolb, 1994; Chornenki,
1997; Kolan, 1999; Moore, 1996); they are not sure that neutrality exists (Rifkin, Millen and Cobb, 1991); they question that mediation can prevent violence (Kmitta, 1997); some doubt mediation helping social justice issues (McCormick, 1997; Lam, Rifkin and Townley, 1989; Wing, 1988); and for some mediation is used as a political strategy. My findings of the peer mediation process is in exact opposition to these suspicions. In fact, some of my findings provide evidence to the contrary.

Active listening is not a gimmick. The students in my study credit the peer mediation process for teaching them listening skills. They find it very important that disputants listen to each other during the mediation because they can only verify the facts and find solutions to their conflict if they listen to each other. Perhaps, the mediation process has provided the first opportunity for the disputants to hear the other side of the story. In fact, peer mediators and staff see listening as a part of communication and they believe that peer mediation helps to develop those skills. The Ohio two-year School Conflict Management Demonstration Project 1990-1993 project credits the program for enhancing the mediators' communication skills and the Voices of Youth (Abbo, 1997) recognizes the many social-emotional skills that are developed in peer mediation training. Communication skills (I-messages, reframing, summarizing, asking questions) are considered good for the peer mediation process. One can only reframe and summarize if one listens well. Therefore, reframing must be done properly to be effective but it was not a problem in my study.

The disputants accept the leadership role of the mediators. Disputants
appreciate their peers mediating their conflicts because they say that their peers are equals and they share similar experiences so they can understand them better than adults. The literature supports that perception too. Crawford and Bodine (1996) say:

Young people can connect with their peers in ways that adults cannot. Peer mediators can frame disputes in the perspective, language, and attitudes of youth. Young people perceive peer mediation as a way to talk out problems without the fear of an adult judging their behaviour, thoughts, or feelings. Peer mediators are respected because they uphold the problem-solving process and honour the disputants in the way they conduct the mediation sessions (p. 24).

The “report” of Crawford and Bodine (1996) supports my findings and demonstrates that most of the concerns of the critics are not present in peer mediation at the secondary school level. Since other studies do not investigate the peer mediation process in secondary schools additional proof based on the literature is not available. However, as a practitioner, I acknowledge that some of the criticisms about mediation are valid but I have not experienced any of the concerns expressed by the critics in school mediation. Neutrality is also difficult to speak to because most people carry invisible baggage around with them and self assessment is not observed. Based on my findings and my discussions with the Co-ordinators of the peer mediation programs, the peer mediators in my study did not display any signs to suggest that they could not be “neutral” during the peer mediation process. However, the schools in my study encourage the peer mediators to declare their neutrality or lack of it when they are assigned to conduct a mediation. They may know the disputants or feel uncomfortable mediating an issue and they usually
inform their coordinators of their feelings. They would not be permitted to mediate that conflict.

Students have a positive perception of mediation. The students in my study, the mediators and disputants, believe that peer mediation prevents violence. They also believe that peer mediation is an alternative to suspension. What is most disturbing is Webster's (1993) perception that conflict resolution programs, like peer mediation, is a waste of time. Webster (1993) says that he is skeptical that existing conflict resolution programs can reduce interpersonal violence, for the following reasons:

- There is no evidence that such programs produce long-term changes in violent behaviour or risk of victimization;
- In the absence of other supporting interventions, classroom-based curricula generally have failed to produce sustainable behaviour changes for other health and social problems among youth;
- The assumptions regarding conflict resolution programs and violence are questionable; and
- The programs provide political cover for politicians, bureaucrats, and school officials and distracts the public from the structural determinants of youth violence. (Webster, 1993, p. 127)

The statements cited in this chapter by Crawford and Bodine (1996) as well as the findings of my study provide evidences to show the inaccuracy of his statement.

In summary, it is obvious that peer mediation affects the school climate, peer mediators, other students, teachers and administrators. Garrity (1996) supports this view. He asks what do you do when the principal at the middle school or high school comes to you and says:

We have a feud going on between two groups. There are at least three or four students in each group. It's been going on for months. The groups have the symptoms of gangs. We've tried everything and we don't know what to do next. Can mediation help? (p. 5)
He said, “If you have experience and faith in the mediation process you may say, ‘Yes’ I think we can put together a team of mediators to work on this. Tell me more about it” (p. 5). This shows the power of mediation and the effectiveness of the process for varied conflicts.

**SUPPORT AND LEADERSHIP**

Four new ideas emerge from my study. The first is the cost of the program in terms of human resource (teacher time), training and the cost to the peer mediators in a number of ways. Implementing a successful peer mediation program requires planning (Schrump, Crawford & Bodine, 1997, p. 69). Teachers need time to develop an implementation plan to cover six main phases: develop program team and commitment to program, design and plan the program, select and train mediators, educate a critical mass of the school population, develop and execute promotional campaign as well as operate and maintain the program (Schrump, Crawford & Bodine, 1997). The responsibilities of the teachers involved in the peer program are not difficult to recognize, but it is not written about in the literature or investigated by researchers. Some peer mediators are equally involved as the teachers. The planning, implementation and mediation of conflicts absorb a considerable amount of their time that they might otherwise spend doing their school work and in some cases, spend at their part-time employment. This, too, is not recognized in the literature.

The second is the lack of support that most administrators, policy makers and
those involved with curriculum give to the peer mediation program in schools. The students are virtually on their own (Rintoul, 1999). Schools that have implemented successful conflict management programs have had to overcome at least two obstacles: a lack of funding and a lack of understanding about the field of conflict resolution (Final Report of the School Conflict Management Demonstration Project 1990 - 1993). The Final Report of the Conflict Management Demonstration Project 1990 -1993 (1996) shared some experiences of administrators and policy makers with the peer mediation process. One superintendent said that he was in a 4th grade class when two students started an argument and the third student, mediator, quietly popped into the middle of the dispute and mediated on the spot. Within a couple of minutes the dispute was over and the teacher did not have to stop teaching and take care of the dispute. Thomas Moyer, Chief Justice, The Supreme Court of Ohio says that many of the disputes that people wish “to take to court’ are better resolved through mediation and that teaching conflict resolution skills to young people makes sense. He says that the skill learned in their youth will enhance their understanding of the various means by which legal disputes may be resolved. Ted Sanders, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Ohio Department of Education also says that conflict management initiatives help prepare students for life’s challenges. He says, “Resolution (of conflicts) is indeed the ‘fourth R’ for the 1990s and beyond.” The report concludes that although many innovative-thinking superintendents, perceptive principals, dedicated teachers and counselors, and skilled students have successfully initiated school conflict resolution programs,
secure on-going funding and increase awareness remain high priorities.

The third is the leadership that emerged from the work of the peer mediators to keep the program functioning. The importance of their leadership is seen by the results of the work that they do in the school community. Jones (1997) found that peer mediation programs provide significant benefit in developing constructive social and conflict behaviour in children at all education levels, significantly improving school climate, effectively handling peer disputes and that they are effective at all educational levels (p. 5-10). In addition, it is essential that evaluation procedures be built into the peer mediation program (Morse & Ivey, 1996). Morse & Ivey (1996) say that evaluation procedures involve an evaluation of the mediation and the collecting of data regarding the number of mediations held, the types of conflicts mediated, and the outcomes of mediation. Students in my study say that they help their coordinator with these leadership tasks. These leadership tasks and the frequent mediations that the peer mediators conduct help both teachers and administrators to keep the programs alive.

The fourth is that peer mediation functions as a disciplinary consequence. It plays an unwritten and unrecognized function, supporting aspects of the suspension policy. Cunningham's (1997, p. 31) study found that mediation is used as an alternative to suspension and it appears to be a successful disciplinary option which was used in many secondary schools. Peer mediators assist the administrators when they mediate conflicts. They mediate before the conflicts develop into fully blown conflicts and they mediate after the conflicts develop into
a fight. The students who fight are usually suspended and the mediation is a part of the administrator’s re-entry plan of those students to school. From this perspective the peer mediators help to maintain a peaceful school climate and when they mediate they also help with the discipline of the school.

This research adds to the body of knowledge that presently exists to support the value of peer mediation in schools. My data support those who advocate for peer mediation and it disputes the notion that conflict resolution programs do not work (Posner, 1994; Webster; 1993). Peer mediation is about students helping students to resolve their conflicts. This feature is often overlooked in many discussions. Often, peer mediation is overshadowed by the negative stigma of other conflict resolution programs, some of which may not work. However, my study and many others demonstrate that peer mediation works.
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the study was to explore the practice and the impact of the peer mediation process in secondary schools. Another purpose is to provide educators and other readers with information about the process so that they can make informed decisions about the implementation and conduct of the program into their school community. The process of investigation was guided by the conceptual framework and by questions which followed from it and from the literature in the field of conflict resolution and peer mediation.

The investigation employed qualitative methods of research. I conducted a pilot study to assist in the development of the questions and I interviewed thirty-three participants: eight peer mediators, two disputants, two non-disputants, six who refused mediation, seven teachers, one non-teaching staff and seven administrators. Each interview lasted for at least an hour.

The conceptual framework has four categories. They are pre-mediation, referral and organization, mediation and outcomes. The interviews brought into focus issues and concerns that have not been previously researched in secondary schools. Unfortunately, the interviews were conducted at the time of the Teachers’ strike. As a result, I could only speak with eighteen year olds. However this study has provided new information. There are studies on peer mediation and on the peer mediation process, but none has dealt specifically with the peer mediation process in secondary schools. However, the findings of this study are consistent
with the research cited in the literature.

This study has given a “voice” to peer mediators from eight secondary schools. The peer mediators have enlightened the readers about peer mediation in their school and have explained the effects of the process on their personal lives, relationships, school climate and families. In addition, they have demonstrated their ability to mediate conflicts and to become partners in the maintenance of peace in the school community. Their knowledge and expertise are varied and powerful and as a result they have contributed to the knowledge of peer mediation in secondary schools.

This study demonstrates that peer mediation provides one of the best opportunities for creating peaceful schools. The problem is that educators, in my view, are not sufficiently informed about peer mediation to be convinced that the program can present one of the best hopes for creating and maintaining successful and safe schools. Therefore, peer mediation programs often exist unnoticed and remain unsupported by some educators. The study is also significant because it verifies and brings to the forefront ten issues that are important to the field of peer mediation and conflict resolution.

The first is that this study verifies that peer mediators can peacefully resolve the conflicts of their peers. This had been substantiated by both quantitative and qualitative studies on peer mediation; by doctoral studies (Anticoli, 1997; Engert, 1996; Davenport, 1997, Nelson-Haynes, 1995); by reports (Jones, 1997; Hanson & McAuliffe, 1996; Jenkins & Smith, 1987; Schumpf, Crawford & Bodine, 1991;

The second is that peer mediation promotes ethics. It creates the need for the truth to be put forward before a problem can be solved (Strike, Haller & Soltis, 1988). The study also places a lot of emphasis on peace education as it promotes the theory that high (secondary) school students are good teachers of peace (Bickmore, 1993). Personal values are evident in peer mediation programs. The very decision to implement or not to implement a program is based on values because peer mediation gives a "voice" to students and shares decision-making and power. Begley's (1990) reference to how administrators values influence their decisions is relevant to my study. Their values will determine the implementation of a peer mediation program in their school. In addition, administrators are always making decisions and choices about new initiatives and if they do not value problem solving as a function that peer mediators can do, the program may be rejected. The more reflective among administrators are all conscious of how their own personal values may blind or illuminate the assessment of situations (Begley, 1996, p. 405). Mediation creates the need for administrators to be mindful of their values especially when there is a value conflict involved because value affects their practices. Begley and Johansson (1997) say:

When called upon to mediate value conflicts, it is useful for administrators to be able to distinguish between personal, professional, organizational and social values. They must know which values are appropriate to a situation
and/or justifiable by educational leaders who are simultaneously autonomous individuals, agents of society accountable to an established system of educational governance, professionals, and members of the community served by the education system (p. 3).

The concept of value conflicts in education is closely related to Campbell’s (1996) focus on Ethical School Leadership: Problems of an Elusive Role. She recognizes the difficulty of defining what ethical or moral leadership means in practice and the challenges to identify, define, describe, achieve and comprehend it. Her study on teachers’ and principals’ moral dilemmas noted that principals are called on to mediate problems as they arise. They use decision making and conflict resolution strategies and techniques that are perceived to be reasonably value neutral. She challenges educational practitioners to fulfill their professional obligations in ways that are moral and ethical. In addition, she believes that it is important for educators to contemplate the essence of their work, the values they transmit formally and informally in their daily practice and the implications of these values for those with whom they are engaged,

Third, the study confirms the theory that peer mediation transforms the lives of the mediators and those who practice mediation (Bush & Folger, 1994). In addition, it verifies the “peace virus” hypothesis (Crary, 1992) because the positive impact of the program affects the homes since the mediators transfer their knowledge and skills to their home setting (Johnson & Johnson, 1995).

Fourth, peer mediation is seen, in my study, as a significant alternative to suspension. It can be used to support the discipline policy. Some administrators say
that they send students to mediation as a part of a re-entry plan after a suspension and to put closure to a conflict. This makes peer mediation an unwritten component of the discipline policy.

Fifth, peers trust their peers to resolve their problems. This is true even for the disputants (sources) because students will tell their peers things that they will not share with the adults. Crawford and Bodine (1996) found that young people can connect with their peers in ways that adults cannot. Peer mediators can frame disputes in the perspective, language, and attitudes of youth. Young people perceive peer mediation as a way to talk out problems without the fear of an adult judging their behaviour, thoughts, or feelings. Peer mediators are respected because they uphold the problem-solving process and honour the disputants in the way they conduct the mediation sessions (p. 24). In my study the mediators admit that they trust their peers and they would discuss things with them that they would not tell adults because they say their peers are their age and they understand their problems more than adults. For this and other reasons advocates like Koch (1988), Furtwengler (1996), Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) promote student leadership. They have provided evidence to illustrate that although “students did not view themselves as leaders and problem-solvers in classroom activities” (Furtwengler, 1996, p. 42), they have the potential and if given the opportunity they can become effective leaders.

My study also illustrates that some students (mediators) have the skills and are prepared to take on leadership roles. The research by Leithwood and Jantzi
(1997) on Distributive Leadership and Student Engagement in School listened to principals, teachers and those in other roles. Three different conceptions of leadership were examined: role-specific leadership, organizational-wide phenomenon and leadership viewed as a selected set of practices. One finding is that high levels of student engagement reduce teachers’ perceived needs for teacher or principal leadership. In addition, “The most obvious interpretation is that student engagement in school is not affected in any important way by school leadership” (p. 24). This finding is in keeping with one of the results of my study, that is, students listen more to their peers (mediators) than to the other adults in their lives for the reasons expressed earlier. In addition, peer mediators are ready for the challenge.

Sixth, peer mediators are exemplary student leaders. They are well trained and they can initiate the resolution of conflicts with better success (Koch, 1988) than most adults once they are involved in the process (Furtwengler, 1996). In addition, peer mediation supports the concept of Distributive Leadership in Secondary Schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). The empirical research provides evidence for the contribution of student participation in school leadership. My study demonstrates that peer mediators are capable, willing and ready to take on additional leadership positions in their schools.

Seventh, is the lack of support for peer mediation. Peer mediators are usually left to maintain the programs. The program is seen as an attachment. Some teachers are not even aware that they have a peer mediation program in their
school. Yet the programs flourish and make long lasting impact on the school climate, mediators and student behaviour. The peer mediation programs flourish despite the lack of support because all program coordinates in my study are committed to the program. These coordinators accept the lack of support as a challenge to show the positive impact of peer mediation. This approach helps the peer mediation programs to flourish.

Eighth, the participants in this study believe that school violence is on the increase. They also say that school violence is a daily problem and that it is not decreasing with the use of traditional methods. This study reports on school violence from the perspectives of the administrators, teachers, and students. It also provides evidence that challenging students can be reached. Peer mediation offers a different approach. This is supported by the work of James Vigil (1999).

Nineth, students believe that peer mediation teaches lifelong skills. Peer mediators are committed to the program because they see and feel the differences that the program will bring to them. These nine issues stand out as significant because they are important to the program and to research previously done on peer mediation in schools.

Peer mediation is the nucleus of peace. It provides leadership, fellowship and growth. Its impact is far reaching and like a virus it touches the lives of peers, teachers, administrators, parents. It changes the environment through its effects on the school climate and the classroom. It forces adults to give the youth a “voice.” Yet skeptics have strong and convincing arguments against peer mediation. This
is so because its leadership is empowering and it can be difficult to subdue. Therefore, mediators can become more empowered and confident earlier than some adults are ready for the change. Once the program is firmly implemented and the students are sufficiently trained their presence will be felt. Some may abuse their privilege and power differentials (Cormick, 1996) can become a concern. Neutrality is usually difficult to practice since one is either neutral or not neutral, and that too could be abused. Despite the paradoxes and the dialogues, I believe that the two features of peer mediation that remain constant are mediation is consistently proactive as well as intervention. Second is that peer mediation is not a waste of time or of money (Webster, 1993). It will always be necessary until human beings begin to respect each other.

Three areas involving peer mediation in secondary schools need further investigation. The first is to give a “voice” to peer mediators and other students who are between 14 and 17 years of age. Their responses will add to my investigation of peer mediation in secondary schools. The second is to investigate the training programs for peer mediators. Coordinators who are training students to become peer mediators need more information. Third is to investigate the real cost (money value) to implement a peer mediation program in a secondary school. Perhaps more administrators will implement a peer mediation program in their school community if they knowing, in advance, how much money they need to commit to the program.
Appendix A

Research in Peer Mediation (Secondary Schools)
1989-1999
(Dissertation abstracts international)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>UNIVERSITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Peer Mediation and Negotiation in the Middle School: an investigation of training effects (Dudley, Bruce)</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Minnesota (145 p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Disrespect, Misbehaviour, and Violence: a case study of a suburban high school (Parietti, Patrick)</td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Columbia Univ. Teachers C (154 p)</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>Peer Mediation Training: Developmental Effects for High School Mediators (Sweeney, Brian)</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>North Carolina State (218 p)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>The Impact on Student Conflict Resolution Program in Dallas Public Schools (Texas) (Nelson-Haynes, Lillie)</td>
<td>Conflict Res.</td>
<td>Texas Woman’s Univ. (199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Impact of the peer Mediation Component of The New Mexico Center for Dispute</td>
<td>Peer Med.</td>
<td>Northern Colorado</td>
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<td>Location</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution through Peer Mediation: an assessment of possible significant differences in effectiveness of application/ interview and/or sociometrically selected mediators (leadership).</td>
<td>Seton Hall</td>
<td>(213 p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>The Implications of Peer Mediation in a Middle School Context (Conflict Resolution, Violence Prevention)</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>(298)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>The effects of a Peer Mediation Training Program of High School and Elementary School Students (High School Students, Mediation, Conflict Resolution)</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>(130)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Perceptions of the Peer Mediation components of a school-wide Conflict Resolution Program: Resolving Conflict Creatively</td>
<td>Northern Arizona</td>
<td>(330 p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Study of a Mediation Program in a Junior High School (Conflict Resolution)</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>(271 p)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>A Two-Year Comparative Study of Participants and Nonparticipants in a Peer Mediation program at model school (students)</td>
<td>Univ of Alabama</td>
<td>(83 p)</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>Assessing the Effects of a Peer Mediation Training Program on Skill Acquisition, Maintenance and Generalization</td>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>(155 p)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>&quot;He Said/She Said&quot;: a case study of Barriers and Enablers in a Rural Middle School Conflict Resolution Program (Rural Educ, Peer Mediation)</td>
<td>Southern Illinois</td>
<td>(206 p)</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>The Relationship Between Mediation and School Climate as Evidenced by Selected Critical Incidents (Davenport, Kathleen)</td>
<td>Conflict R/ Peer Mediation</td>
<td>Florida Atlantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Peaceful Possibilities: Three Years of Evaluative Research of School Based Conflict Resolution Programs (Kmita, Daniel)</td>
<td>Conflict Res.</td>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
</tr>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>The effects of Peer Mediation Training and Practice on Self-Esteem and Social Skills among Peer Mediators in a Vocational Technical High School. (Nelson, Keith)</td>
<td>Training &amp; Practice</td>
<td>Temple</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>&quot;You and Me, Babe&quot;: an inquiry into applications of rhetoric to mediation and empowerment (Peer Mediation, Intervention) (Nims, Cheryl)</td>
<td>Peer Med.</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>Impact of a Peer Mediation Program on a Middle School Environment (Conflict Resolution) (Baker, Norma Jean)</td>
<td>Con. Res.</td>
<td>Univ. of La Verne</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>An Analysis of the Relationship Between Sch. Safety and Social Integration (Safety) (Frederikson, John)</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Univ. of Montana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>School-Based Peer Mediation Programs: Purpose, Progress and Promise (Violence, Public Schools) (Guy, Stephen Burdette)</td>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Univ. of Mass.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Providing Consultative Services to Multiple</td>
<td>Conflict Res</td>
<td>Rutgers The Univ.</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

"Groups Working within a School-Based Peer Resource Program: A case investigation (School Psychologists, Education Reform, Conflict Resolution, Social Skills) (O'Shaughnessy, Michael Edward)"
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MEDIATORS

Definitions
1. What is mediation? How would you describe a mediator?

2. Give me an example of a conflict? How would you respond to that conflict in your role as a mediator?

General Questions
3. What do you think are the goals of the peer mediation program?

4. How important is peer mediation to your life as a student?

5. (a) What happens in your school when there is a conflict between two or more students?
   (b) What choices do students have to resolve their conflicts?
   (c) Why mediation?

6. How do students hear about mediation?

PRE-MEDIATION
a) Selection
7. How were you selected to become a peer mediator?

b) Training
8. (a) What training have you received?
   (b) How many sessions did you attend?
   (c) How long did each last?
   (d) How many hours of training do you have?
   (e) What did you learn?
   (f) How do you apply this knowledge?

REFERRAL
9. What types of conflicts are sent to mediation, e.g., student/student, student/teacher?

10. How do you get the cases to mediate?

11. What happens if a student sent to mediation refuses to cooperate during mediation?

12. When do you think mediation should be used?
MEDIATION: What happens in mediation?
13. Walk me through a mediation (what happens during mediation?)
14. Where and when (time of day) do you mediate conflicts?
15. How frequently do you help others who are in conflict?
16. How do you deal with students sent to mediation because of a fight?
17. How confident are you to demonstrate or enact the skills taught in training?
18. What conflicts do not get resolved?
19. What happens after the mediation is completed? Does the process end?

POST MEDIATION: What are the outcomes?
a) Impact on Students
20. What is peer mediation doing or not doing for you personally?
21. How does being a peer mediator help or not help the relationship that you have with your peers, your teachers and your parents?
22. Are you satisfied with the mediation process? Why?

b) Impact on School Climate
23. What effects, if any, do you think the peer mediation program has on your school? How do you know?
APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DISPUTANTS

Definitions
1. What is mediation? How would you describe a mediator?

2. What is a conflict? Give me an example of a conflict that you were involved in? How did you respond to that conflict?

General Questions
3. What do you think are the goals of the peer mediation program?

4. (a) What happens in your school when there is a conflict between two or more students?
   (b) What choices do you have to resolve your conflicts peacefully? What is your choice? Why?

5. What happens when there is a fight?

6. What was the last dispute that you were involved in? Tell me about it?

7. How important is mediation to your life as a student?

8. How do students hear about the mediation program in this school?

PRE-MEDIATION: selection for mediation
9. How did you become involved in mediation? Was mediation your choice? Why?

REFERRAL
10. Who sent you to mediation?

11. How were you referred, e.g., with a note, a referral form, word of mouth etc.?

12. Tell me about a time when you were sent to mediation because you were involved in a fight or in an argument?

13. When do you think peer mediation should be used?

14. What happens if you choose or not choose mediation? Why?

15. Where and when (time of day) did you go to mediation?

MEDIATION: What happens in the process?
16. What happened during the mediation process? Did it work? Are you satisfied with the peer mediation process? Why?
POST-MEDIATION: What are the outcomes?
17. What change(s), if any, do you notice in your attitude to aggressive behaviour after you were involved in the process?

18. What effects if any do you think the peer mediation program has on your school? How do you know?
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: Coordinator of the program

General Question
1. Why are you the coordinator of the peer mediation program?

2. How common are physical fights, disruptive behaviour, verbal disagreements, and nonverbal harassment in your school?

3. What is involved in the implementation of a peer mediation program in this school, i.e., how much teacher time is involved, planning, cost of resources etc.?

4. What are the goals of the program?

PRE-MEDIATION: selection & training
5. How are students selected to become peer mediators?

6. Tell me about your training program for the peer mediators. Who does the training? How many hours are involved before a student starts to mediate conflicts?

REFERRAL
7. What types of conflicts do you send to mediation, e.g., student/student etc.?

8. Who send conflicts to mediation?

9. How is the referral process organized?

10. What happens if a student does or does not choose to use mediation? What are the options? Why?

11. When, in your view, should mediation be used?

12. Where and when does mediation take place?

MEDIATION
13. What theory of mediation are you using as a basis for your peer mediation program?

14. How do you get the referral for mediation? Is there a record of all conflicts within the school or do you only have a record of conflicts brought to mediation? Why?

15. What types of disputes are involved in mediation? What happens after a mediation is completed?

16. What conflicts do not get resolved?

17. What action is taken to avoid a recurrence of the conflict?
18. Is gender or race/ethnicity of students related to the impact of the mediation? Does it matter who the mediator is?

POST-MEDIATION: What are the outcomes?
19. What is the impact of the peer mediation program in your school?

20. Is your mediation program involved with the Juvenile Justice System for Young Offenders? If so, what impact does it have on the school climate?

21. What is the agreement/settlement rate?

22. How satisfied are the mediators and disputants with the mediation process and the outcome?

23. Are you satisfied with the peer mediation process? Why?
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: TEACHERS

1. Do you support the peer mediation program? Why?

2. In your opinion, does peer mediation effectively handle disputes? Please explain your answer.

3. Where does peer mediation fit into your life as a teacher? Why?

4. How much of your time and how much resources are needed to implementation the peer mediation program in this school?

5. What are the goals of the peer mediation program?

6. How do students hear about peer mediation?

7. How do you deal with students who fight?

PRE-MEDIATION
8. Did you recommend students to be trained as peer mediation? What criteria did you use to select students?

REFERRAL
9. What types of conflicts do you send to mediation? Why mediation?

10. How do you make your referrals?

11. Who else refers students to mediation?

12. What happens if a student chooses not to use mediation as an option? Why?

13. Where and when does mediation take place?

14. When in your opinion should mediation be used?

MEDIATION
15. What conflicts do not get resolved?

POST-MEDIATION
16. What is the impact of the peer mediation program on the school climate?
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: ADMINISTRATORS

1. Why do you have a peer mediation program in your school?

2. What are the goals of the program?

3. What resources are involved in the implementation of the program?

4. Do you support the program? Why?

5. Where does peer mediation fit into your life as an administrator?

6. How do students hear about the peer mediation program?

PRE-MEDIATION

7. What part do you play in the selection and training of the peer mediators?

REFERRAL

8. Do you refer students to mediation? Why?

9. At what stage do you refer students to mediation? Why?

10. What types of conflicts do you send to mediation? Why?

11. What happens if a student does or does not choose to use mediation? What are the options? Why?

12. How is the referral made? Who else makes referrals?

MEDIATION

13. What conflicts do not get resolved in mediation? What happens then?

POST-MEDIATION

14. What is the impact of the peer mediation program on suspensions, fights and the general school climate?
Appendix G

Interview with Parent

1. Last night you mentioned about mediation to the school advisory council. Tell me more about what you said and what you meant.

Well at the meeting the principal of the school spoke of an incident that occurred whereby three grade 9 students had beaten up another grade 9. Now his solution for this was to call the police and have the kids arrested. Now I personally think that there could be another way to punish or have some type of disciplinary action and I would not have chosen arresting because that will give the kids a record. So after hearing this, I asked the principal if they had peer mediation in their school. He told me that they did start a program but that the teachers that were involved were too busy and they couldn’t continue with it. Now my personal interpretation of the whole thing was that seeing that sometimes the kids who get into trouble get into trouble because of peer pressure I think that if they had a mediation program whereby their own peers were talking to them you would find that solutions would be better formed or better accepted because it is like one kid talking to another or one buddy speaking to the other. I also thought that mediation is one way of solving some of the problems. If you choose to call the police every time a simple thing happens when you have the big problems what recourse will you take? I am not saying that we have to take the fact that the kids beat the girl lightly but I personally think that if it wasn’t a serious situation by mediating, mediating from the point that suspending them for a couple days or expelling them from the school for that matter, they still have the chance to get into another school or if they go through a suspension at least they can come back to a school without having a record but as it stands they don’t have mediation and they have a record and they are only in grade 9. I think that is tarnishing their whole future. We don’t know what led to the fight. Maybe it was something that occurred outside of the school that was now brought into the school and is being sorted out in the school system and these girls were punished for it. So, that is why I think if they had peer mediation for that particular problem everything would have been opened up or they would have been able to address the different issues that actually led to the fight.

2. Do you know how serious the fight was?
Well, this is second hand or third hand information. It was said the girl would not be able to have kids but as I said that is what I heard.

3. What do you mean she won’t be able to have kids?
Because they kicked her so much in her tummy, that they damaged the inside. That’s what I heard.

4. So, are you saying that they should mediate a serious situation?
I think they should have a mediation system in the school whereby it prevents. Some of these things could be prevented. If you have, I’m sure, most times you would hear the kids saying there is going to be a fight tomorrow. If you as a parent, or a teacher or a student, fellow student, hear about this I am sure there are cases whereby you can bring those kids together before it happens and talk it out or come to some type of agreement or even if you have to threaten them and say “if you do this" and give them the consequences before they
even consider it. I really think that in some cases the kids will reconsider and not go about it the way they usually do. Even the situations that occur. Some of them are violent situations. We can't always blame the kids. Some of them are going through a lot of stress and if we don't address the stresses of some of our children we are not doing them any good. We are doing an injustice instead of addressing them we take them more into a situation whereby they have the police in. The kids just, they're just going from bad to worse and its not helping any. We are raising a community of hooligans.

5. You seem to be passionate about mediation. Do you have a child who is a mediator?
Yes, I do.

6. What impact does that have on how you feel about mediation?
Well, my daughter started the mediation program at School M and since then, even on a personal level, mother/daughter, brother/sister relationship you can hear her bring up points in mediation or problem solving. That helps. It prevents a lot of conflicts whether it is saying exactly how she thinks it should be dealt with or if she can't deal with it at the same time she would walk away from the situation which is what I think some of our kids need to learn to do. If you realize that something is just too much for you instead of staying there and getting into a fight, leave the area, get away from it where you can cool off and then maybe come back and readdress it. That's one aspect of peer mediation that I see that is profitable and successful. Another part is even her relationship with her friends. I can hear her giving them advise on the phone, overhearing that or even when they come to the home. You know different ways that she would tell them or suggest to them to solve certain problems and I think it's beneficial to all of them. Even to my child who has the mediation program she can be a devil's advocate in her own personal problems. You know, although parents are there it's not all kids who always want their parents knowing everything that's going on. They usually still refer to their peers for their support and advise. More so, sometimes more than the parents. So I think it is important in them having these tools to help them.

7. What is your perception of mediation?
It's a way in which the kids can help themselves, help others, prevent themselves from getting into unnecessary problems, learning to deal with life situations because the world we live in not easy right now, to address the problems. Just to address it, realizing ok it's not what I like but if you can somehow or other adjust it would be better than trying to get violent about it, you know.

8. What do you see the mediator doing?
The mediator, I would look at the mediator as someone who is a middle person.

9. What would you say to someone who does not believe in mediation?
I would try to instill in them the positive results, the positive thoughts, the positive lessons that I have learnt or observed or witnessed from the kids who are mediators or the kids who are mediating and hopefully I can present it to them in a way that they would want to accept it.
10. **So send a message now to Johnson.**
I think that Mr. Johnson should realize that in the school system, having the police address every problem when it comes to kids is the wrong way to go because if they kick the kids out of school every time there is a problem, these kids are out on the streets they have nothing to do, they get more frustrated, they might go and get themselves into more problems, they break and enter their homes while they are out there working and when the kids reenter the school system they get way behind in school, frustrated, and that's not a positive thing for them. So, by him having a mediation program, mediators and a lot, I would suggest the mediators should be of their own age group or a year older because kids relate to kids. Just as how, when they are doing the negative things, and they want their buddy to join them, if they're doing the positive things they might be able to encourage them to go the opposite route. So by him addressing and accepting mediation, I think it would cut down on a lot of violence in the school system.

11. **Is that the same message that you would give to the principal?**
Yes!

**And to the Board?**
Yes!

**Anything else that I have not pulled out of you?**
I think that there should be a mandate to have mediation in all schools. Part of the curricular. Just as how we have those half courses like religion course. You do it but it is not a credit. Have mediation as such.

12. **Do you know anything about the process of mediation?**
No.
Appendix H

SHORT-TERM IMPACT OF PEER MEDIATION ON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
Disputants' described what happened during the peer mediation process that helped to
create a successful agreement.

The following are the findings from Kolan's study (1999).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happened during Mediation</th>
<th>Description from Disputants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;We talked*</td>
<td>&quot;We talked.&quot; &quot;I realized that I misunderstood something.&quot; &quot;The other disputant told the truth.&quot; I apologized for being wrong.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They expressed their feelings</td>
<td>&quot;I was able to express my feelings.&quot; &quot;Our relationship was made stronger because we expresses how we felt about one another.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mediation Process</td>
<td>&quot;The process helped me find a solution.&quot; &quot;The process helped me find the root of the problem.&quot; &quot;Written agreement.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mediators</td>
<td>&quot;The mediators.&quot; &quot;The mediators told me the consequences if I would ever come back to mediation with the same disputant.&quot; &quot;The mediators rushed through the process.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kolan counted the responses. "We talked" gain the highest score (40) and responses like
"I apologized for being wrong" gained the lowest (2).

Kolan, 1999, p. 94
Appendix I

SUMMARY OF STUDIES WHICH DOCUMENTED MEDIATIONS AND MEDIATION SUCCESS RATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name &amp; Year of Study, State</th>
<th>Number of Mediations</th>
<th>Success Rate</th>
<th>No. &amp; Types of Schools</th>
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<td>The Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution 1990-1993, OH</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>30 Gr K-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model School 1993-1994, GA</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
<td>2 Gr. 6-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge 1989-1990 OH</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1 7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlin 1993-1994 IL</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>1 9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hart 1993-1994 IN</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>1 K-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter &amp; Parco, 1992-1994, NV</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
<td>4 K-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carruthers 1993-1994, NC</td>
<td>841</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>14 K-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crary 1989, CA</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>1 6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kmitta &amp; Berlowitz 1993-1995</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>82.2%</td>
<td>4 9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2803</strong></td>
<td><strong>88.5%</strong></td>
<td><strong>79 K-12</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kmitta (1997, p. 51)

Endnote

Lam (1989) in his discussion of the success rate of the peer mediation process in schools, defined success in terms of the number of mediations that have been successfully completed by the signing of a mediation contract between the disputing parties. In addition, he says, success is evident by the documentation of the satisfaction of the agreement between disputants two weeks to one month after the mediation occurred. Lam (1989) also discovered that eight program evaluations documented mediation success rates ranging from 85% to 93% (Kmitta, 1997, p. 50). The above summaries some studies that Kmitta (1997) claims have documented mediations and mediation success rates.
Appendix J

PEER MEDIATION REFERRAL FORM

Referred by __________________________ Date: ______________
Student/s 1. __________________________ 2. __________________________
3. __________________________ 4. __________________________

Referral submitted to:
a) Vice Principal:
   Name: __________________________
or
b) Peer Co-ordinator:
   Name: __________________________
or
c) Staff Advisors:
   Name: __________________________

Reason/s for referral:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
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Comments:
____________________________________________________________________
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____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
Action taken by peer mediation personnel:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
REFERENCES


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