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Managers' Experiences Coordinating Peer Mediation Programs in Schools

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Ingrid Jeannis

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Managers' Experiences Coordinating Peer Mediation Programs in Schools

by

Ingrid Jeannis

MA, New York University, 1994

MS, Herbert H. Lehman College, 1990

BA, Herbert H. Lehman College, 1988

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In Counseling Psychology

Walden University

May 2023

Abstract

Peer mediation (PM) programs implemented in schools promote resolution of disputes and conflicts among peers. Several benefits have been associated with young children involved in these programs including reductions in physical aggression, as well as learning skills involving communication, problem solving, and decision making. While positive outcomes have been observed, less was known about manager experiences involving coordinating PM programs. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore manager thoughts and experiences regarding their roles in PM programs and how they perceived strengths and weaknesses of these programs. The social learning theory was the theoretical framework for this study. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with five coordinators of PM programs working in high schools. Results of phenomenological analysis indicated that PM programs were perceived as highly useful and a strong positive means of solving conflicts in school settings. Using these program strategies leads to children's empowerment by creating means to address their conflicts without exacerbating conflicting situations. Participants expressed the need for school support to foster engagement in terms of applying PM initiatives. Results of this study can be used for positive social change and lead to creation, implementation, and refinement of PM programs.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to all schools, public, private, and parochial. I especially dedicate it to schools with a strong need for peer mediation programs, New York City public schools being among them.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge a few people who have supported me and have made it possible for me to accomplish this goal. I would like to start with my former Chairman, Dr. Richard Waite whom I have started the journey with. Dr. Waite was one of the few professors who were interested in peer mediation. He was an inspiring and an encouraging mentor. I always felt there was light at the end of the tunnel. I would like to thank my present Chairwoman, Dr. Susana Verdinelli whose enthusiasm and support are unshakable. Dr. Verdinelli was my methodologist when I first started the program and she was always very supportive and engaging. I would also like to thank my second committee Chair, Dr. Lee Stadtlander and the University Research Reviewer, Dr. Amy Sickel for their contribution. I would also like to thank Ms. Carolyn Roney for without her advocacy I would not have finish this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Violence in school is a pervasive problem, and its increasing frequency suggests an epidemic (Grossman & Garry, 1997). Some events, such as the Columbine shootings in 1999, have brought problems of on-campus violence to the general public's attention. The present generation of high school students manifests aggressive behaviors at a greater rate than previous generations (Grossman & Garry, 1997; Hasday, 2002). This suggests that students no longer conform to expected societal norms involving desired behaviors. Crucially, strategies developed to decrease school violence are comparatively recent and encompass multiple social network layers involving high school students. School violence results in new pressures on schools to reach out to students using police, gang intervention workers, mental health workers, social service workers, clergy, and business communities (Grossman & Garry; Hasday, 2002).

One way to increase opportunities to reduce school violence is to develop peer mediation (PM) programs. PM is a specific form of conflict resolution that involves using students as neutral third parties in resolving disputes (Olweus, 1997). PM programs help students resolve interpersonal issues through trained mediators from faculty or student communities. They may reduce occurrence of aggressive behaviors on the part of students because these programs help to reconcile problems between students (Olweus, 1997). Moreover, these programs enable students to resolve their conflicts without resorting to violent acts and develop close relationships with their teachers (Olweus, 1997). However, despite use of these PM programs in many schools, the need is still great for more effective programs in various urban high schools to prevent violence or

keep it at a minimum (Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Olweus, 2001). According to Grossman and Garry (1997), a key component of running an effective PM program is perceptions and participation of teachers and/or supervisors directly involved in such programs.

PM programs can assist in providing safe schools where students can receive high-quality education without the threat of violence. Many schools have developed plans and strategies to provide safe environments (Grossman & Garry, 1997). These interventions and plans work best with participation and commitment of school staff members, including teachers, supervisors, parents, community groups, and agencies (Grossman & Garry, 1997). However, there is a gap in literature. There are limited studies regarding the performance of program managers involved in PM programs and their effect on programs success. The increase in school violence has fueled interest in conflict resolution (Girard & Koch, 1996). There is, however, a concern among conflict resolution practitioners that the need for immediate fixes to problems may lead to unrealistic and inappropriate goals and expectations (Girard & Koch, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Johnson and Johnson (2000) view conflict resolution as only one aspect of preparing youth to respond to conflicts in nonviolent ways, promote social justice, and reduce prejudice in school communities (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Additional support is needed, and understanding the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences of people who run PM will lead to addressing this issue.

The purpose of this study was to explore mediation managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences about their roles in PM programs. I also sought to gain a deeper understanding of how mediation managers perceived strengths and weaknesses of

their PM programs. This chapter includes the background of the study, problem and purpose statements, research questions, theoretical framework, definitions of terms that were relevant to this study, scope and limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

Bullying has historically been part of the high school social experience and has received significant attention in psychological literature. High school students have been involved in violent behaviors on campus, such as fighting, bullying, cursing, harassing, and threatening (Devoe et al., 2003; Webster-Stratton, 1998). Use of violence and weapons connected to gang activity or individual student challenges has been rising in schools (Addington, 2009). This issue is significant for educators to consider the safety of their students, colleagues, and communities. Due to media coverage of school shootings, schools have adopted a series of measures thought necessary to ensure students cannot replicate these kinds of events (Burns & Crawford, 2007). In recent years, schools have adopted a series of measures in response to a perceived or potential increases in school violence (Marwick et al., 2010). These include increased standard disciplinary measures in schools and additional physical security tools and systems, such as metal detectors and security cameras, X-ray-based inspection of student possessions, and use of identification cards, locker searches, and student strip searches (Marwick et al., 2010). Although school leaders, educators, and parents have become more concerned about identifying triggers of increased violence among students, this does not necessarily mean the chosen response is likely to be the most effective (Burns & Crawford, 2007). These may not be enough to ensure school safety. This is because various social, economic, and personal factors lead

students to make poor choices, which will not necessarily be solved with a specific set of security measures.

Increasingly disruptive behaviors have become tolerated in schools (Cornell, 2005). Dysfunctional families, substance abuse, and changing values of adolescent subcultures have also influenced outcomes of violence in U.S. schools (Sugai & Horner, 2008). Students have misinterpreted typical cues at school, and the fight or flight response, a natural human response, has become misplaced or maladapted. This can cause school bullying and violence directed at schoolmates and teachers (Sugai & Horner, 2008). Repeatedly victimized children often experience various mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Crick et al., 2001). Victims of chronic bullying continue to exhibit social adjustment problems in adulthood. Students feel less safe and are less satisfied with school life when bullying and fighting are evident in classrooms (Olweus & Limber, 1999). Craig and Pepler (2003) stated bullying is often tolerated or ignored. Most bullying or harassing incidents occur in places with little adult supervision, such as playgrounds and hallways. Teachers reported they rarely detect this problem and only intervene in 4% of incidents. Craig and Pepler (1997) reported students tend to believe that bullied students are at least partly to blame for their victimization, bullying makes the victims tougher, and teasing is simply done for fun.

The number of fist fights, physical and verbal threats, and harassment in classrooms, playgrounds, hallways, and cafeteria in the past years underscores one of the primary responsibilities of school officials, which is to prevent students from perpetrating or being victimized by violence or other antisocial behaviors. Anderson et al. (2001)

indicated student perpetrators of homicide were twice as likely as homicide victims to have been bullied by peers. One of the worst examples of bully-instigated violence was the case of two students who killed 13 of their peers and educators and seriously injured 23 others, which took place in Littleton, Colorado in 1999 at Columbine High School. According to Emerson (2001), the two students responsible for the shootings were targets of prolonged bullying, which their educators permitted. This may indicate educators and school supervisors are not focusing on the problem.

The number of recorded violent incidents in schools settings has increased. According to Sacco and Kennedy (2011), the increase in school violence emerges as a relatively recent phenomenon. In the past, the social setting in which schooling occurred was more direct, with greater supervision of students by adult caretakers. A typical school day would start with religious reading, reciting school rules, and observing students for cleanliness. Students were told precisely what to do, how to do it, and when. Students who misbehaved received humiliating punishment, including suspension from school. Teachers did not hesitate to administer punishment. In most towns, schoolmasters (meaning teachers) were permitted to give due corrections in moderation, even for destructive behaviors out of school. Students who came to class unprepared were often punished as well. According to Sloane (1972), some form of punishment would follow, with the schoolmaster using a birch rod, whip, or flat piece of wood called a ferrule to inflict punishment on boys.

Causes of school violence are complex and multifaceted, which means there is no single factor that can fully explain reasons for the occurrence of such events. According

to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), between June 30, 2018 and 2019, there was a total of 39 school-related violent deaths in the U.S. These included students, staff, and other non-student school-associated victims. Furthermore, in 2019, the total victimization rate at schools in the U.S. stood at 30 victimizations for every 1,000 students. Additionally, during the 2019-2020 school year, 77% of schools in the U.S. recorded at least one incident of crime and violence, thereby totaling about 1.5 million incidents. That translated to about 29 incidents for every 1,000 students (NCES, 2022). Thus, there is a real challenge pertaining to violent conduct in schools within the U.S. Feldman (2001) said societal issues such as drug and substance abuse at school and home are factors leading to the rise in violence at school. According to Gatto (1991), violence started becoming increasingly prominent in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Mothers became increasingly involved in the workplace as schools grew, and drugs became more common in homes and schools. Students received less attention from teachers because of larger classrooms and at home, as parents became increasingly more involved in the workplace, thereby reducing hours they spent with their children.

Feldman (2001) analyzed cases of school violence from 1950 to 2001 and determined that although some urban teenagers in the 1950s enjoyed well-run and well-funded schools with academic and social clubs, children in poorer neighborhoods faced different situations compared to their classmates. As a result, some children from poorer neighborhoods opted to join gangs which were involved in vandalizing schools and assaulting teachers and fellow students. Feldman noted that the three R's in New York City's public schools were no longer reading, writing, and arithmetic but rather

rowdyism, riot, and revolt. Olweus (2001) claimed low perceptions of themselves fueled their uptake of self-destructive tendencies. Because of safety concerns, many teachers feel uncomfortable in inner city public schools.

School districts that face the toughest challenges from students often have the fewest funds to meet their students' needs. Schools in poor, deteriorated, and crime-ridden neighborhoods tend to be physically dilapidated, overcrowded, and lacking resources necessary for effective teaching (Hawkins et al., 1999). Classes are much larger than in affluent neighborhoods; students sit at broken desks, and teachers, who are often less well paid than their suburban colleagues must do without laboratory equipment, computers, and chalk and books (Gatto, 2005). Many young people experience anger and feelings of frustration and helplessness, which leads to environments that are ripe for violent reactions due to any provocation (Sherman et al., 1997). Young people often look to schools as safe havens.

Problem Statement

This study involved exploring managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences running PM programs. However, their perceptions have not been included in literature, which as a result, led to less effective PM programs. Understanding managers' perceptions has the potential to help improve PM programs. Students who commit disciplinary infractions must receive responsive actions that meet criteria that are agreed upon by school community members (Sugai & Horner, 2008). PM is a means by which school community members manage discipline (Sugai & Horner, 2008). Exploring PM programs from the perspectives of people who run them was expected to generate

knowledge to increase understanding of problems that schools were facing. It is hoped from this study that administrators and government-level officials would become more convinced of the value of PM programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences about their roles in PM programs. I also sought to gain a deeper understanding of how mediation managers perceived strengths and weaknesses of their PM programs. Participants of this study were coordinators of PM programs at their schools. In all cases, programs they coordinated had existed for more than 5 years. Results of this study have the potential to be applied in new PM programs. From this study, it is possible to learn how to assist administrators and the U.S. federal government in supporting PM programs. Results could also help school personnel, such as teachers, working in established PM programs to become more aware of their attitudes and behaviors regarding programs. This could increase the usefulness of future PM programs. Large urban schools are often anonymous, alienating, and dangerous (Hawkins et al., 1999). Levels of violence and other criminal activities perpetrated by youth within U.S. schools have reached crisis proportions, and conditions that can eliminate these problems do not currently exist (Altheide, 2009; Olweus, 1995). Alternative strategies like PM programs are needed to accomplish this goal.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are mediation managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences regarding their roles in PM programs?

RQ2: What strengths are perceived by managers involving current PM programs?

RQ3: What weaknesses are perceived by managers in current PM programs?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study was the social learning theory. Children learn simply by observing what their parents and others do and then imitating them (Bandura, 1986). By modeling themselves after the people around them, children learn to speak and take on the ways of their culture. According to Bandura (1977), "learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their actions to inform them what to do" (p. 22). Children become more aggressive when they observe aggressive or violent models (Bandura, 1994). Moral judgments regarding right and wrong can partly develop through modeling. Children exhibit violent behaviors through role modeling. This can result from watching television as well as observing parents, neighbors, and peers. These aggressive behaviors are learned (Bandura, 1994).

Role modeling is an important factor in terms of promoting changes in behavior (Bandura, 1997). The behavior of an authority figure has more impact; as a result, students' model after their teachers when given the opportunity. Teachers' unwillingness to modify their views involving authority and model relevant skills themselves is another obstacle contributing to PM failure (Sellman, 2002). Thus, it is essential for teachers,

managers, and other personnel who are running the program to demonstrate effective skills that students could imitate.

Nature of the Study

The research design used in this study was the phenomenological approach. This design allowed participants to describe details as they perceived them. This design was suitable for the present study in order to study a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement and identify patterns and meaningful relationships in terms of participant responses. Through interviews and analysis, I identified subjective experiences of school personnel who run established PM programs. Interview questionnaires were used, and all interviews were tape-recorded for accuracy. I conducted two in-person and three phone interviews.

Definitions of Terms

Several terms were relevant and form the basis of the research. It was vital to detail the meanings of those terms.

Bullying: Physical, verbal, or psychological attack or intimidation intended to cause fear, distress, or harm to the victim; intimidation involves an imbalance of power in favor of the perpetrator (Grossman & Garry, 1997). Repetitive interactions is consistent with bullying experience; it is rarely a one-time occurrence (Olweus, 2001).

Conflict: An antagonistic state resulting from differing or opposing points of view or needs (Potter, 1996).

Conflict resolution: A constructive approach to solving interpersonal and intergroup conflicts. It involves helping people with opposing positions to work together to arrive at mutually acceptable compromise solutions (Simpson, 1998).

Disputant: One involved in a conflict.

Established peer mediation: A program that is active for 5 years or more.

Peer mediation (PM): Process for resolving disputes and conflicts in which a neutral third party or peer (parties) acts as a moderator for the process (Johnson & Johnson, 2000).

Peer mediator: A peer trained to help two or more peers resolve conflict or disagreements (Johnson & Johnson, 2000).

Program manager: Person who coordinates PM programs.

School personnel: Teachers, supervisors, and counselors.

Assumptions

There was an assumption that my knowledge and biases regarding PM programs did not skew results in any direction. I also assumed that the methodology and the phenomenological approach were appropriate for the study and t participants responded to interview questions truthfully and candidly.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The scope was limited to an urban area in the northeast U.S. Although programs were also implemented in other urban areas, results could not be transferred to these areas. The sample included five participants from four established high school PM programs. Of 15 respondents, only four schools met qualifications to participate in the

study. Although many schools had some type of PM program, some were not in good standing because some of these schools were in the process of converting into charter schools or different programs, were not in operation for the required length of time or did not want to participate. Creswell (2007) recommended at least 10 participants for this type of study. I could not obtain this number of participants because only four schools met qualifications for this study. In addition, factors unknown to participants, such as policies, procedures, values, and demographics, could limit these participants' understanding of the program, which could be reflected in their responses. Due to the low number of participants, study results may not be transferable.

Significance of the Study

Due to increased violence in high schools, PM programs are getting more attention as schools attempt to deal with this problem. PM can teach students to mediate and help resolve conflicts for each other and can help to teach staff in the same way. Students who have received mediation or engaged in peer mediation are less likely to participate in fighting, bullying, cursing, and threatening (Grossman & Garry, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Sheppard, 1999; Shure, 1996). Results from this study may be able to positively influence current and future peer mediation programs in terms of policies, procedures, and attitudes.

Summary

Factors such as changed environments, larger classroom sizes, and increasingly challenging living and learning factors within an urban setting have contributed to increased perceptions of school violence and a marked increase in bullying behaviors.

PM programs may help to alleviate these challenges in schools. Mentoring programs also facilitate improved relationships between bullies and those who are bullied, thus promoting more beneficial social settings for both parties. This study involved exploring PM programs in terms of peer mentors' active knowledge, strategies, and observations. This research was aimed to improve PM programs by obtaining managers' perspectives who were running PM programs and thereby contributing to literature on PM and peer mentoring services. Chapter 2 includes a review of literature related to PM programs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review includes extant literature on violent conduct among students. Such violent behaviors include fighting, bullying, cursing, harassing, and threatening. Additionally, the literature review includes discussions of approaches used for addressing this challenge specifically involving PM. I address attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of high school personnel involved in mediating violent conduct by and among students. This chapter includes the literature search strategy used, the literature review on PM, and the history and process of PM. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Literature Search Strategy

I used different search engines and databases to target sources and topics that comprised my literature review section. I accessed peer reviewed articles and other written material through Walden University Library's online portal. Many different databases were used to complete this search, including PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycEXTRA, PyscINFO, Academic Search Complete, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses. I also used Google Scholar for general appraisal of topics in the field. The following key terms were used in various combinations throughout these searches: *peer mediation, peer mediation programs, school violence, school interventions, peer mediation intervention programs, coordination of peer mediation programs, response of teachers to violence,* and *bullying* among other topics.

Conflicts and Violence in the Context of High School Students

Violence Among Adolescents

The challenge contemporary society faces, which is the focus of the present study, is high rates of violence in schools. Associated ills include reducing educational outcomes of both perpetrators and victims. According to Wang et al. (2020), school violence encompasses various acts, including physical assault and battery, physical aggression, and non-contact aggression, such as throwing things. That is in addition to broadly defined externalizing behaviors, bullying, fighting, robbery, possession of weapons, unwanted sexual contact, and verbal threats (Scherer, 2022). According to Ka (1998), learning is significantly hampered in school environments where violence is pervasive; students are significantly limited in terms of their likelihood to meet their educational potential. In addition, teachers cannot teach to their maximum potential. According to Ka (1998), one in five public school students in the U.S. does not feel comfortable going to school every day, resulting in approximately 10% of students opting to skip school together regularly due to different factors, key among which is fear of violence from fellow students.

When children are bombarded with images and messages, psychological stimulus responses lead to increased anxiety (Bergler, 1999). Anderson et al. (2003) noted young people who were shown a brief violent film clip exhibited slower response times in terms of calling adults to help them when they saw two younger children fighting compared with peers who had watched a neutral film. A single violent clip appeared to make

children more tolerant of aggression, at least temporarily. Children are vulnerable to even short exposures to violence.

The typical American child watches 28 hours of television a week. By the age of 18, they will have seen 16,000 simulated murders and 200,000 acts of violence (Osofsky, 1999). In addition, commercial television for children is around 50-60 times more violent than programming created for adults (Osofsky, 1999). Children are trained to respond to violence with humor rather than fear (Osofsky, 1999). Violence is a critical cause of nonfatal injuries among youth, but less than 1% of all violent deaths among school-age children occur in school, on the way to or from school, or at school-sponsored events (Hammond & Arias, 2011). Bullying at schools is an issue that needs to be considered because of its recent increase in prevalence and effects on nonfatal violence (Olweus & Limber, 2010). Olweus and Limber (2010) said the percentage of victimized students (those who were bullied two or three times a month or more often) had increased by approximately 50% since 1983. Furthermore, the percentage of students involved bullying or being bullied at least once weekly had increased by 65%. In comparison, 26% of adolescents had been involved in bullying with some regularity (two to three times a month or more often; Olweus & Limber, 2010). Out of this number, 11% were bullies only, 12.6% were victims, and 3.6% were both victims and perpetrators. Olweus and Limber (2010) said 22.2% of boys and 16.6% of girls reported regular involvement in bullying.

Exposure to violence in media and real life leads to social challenges for many children. Students living in an urban setting face increased challenges involving

delinquency, drug and alcohol use, and poverty or near-poverty living standards, which can negatively impact their overall quality of life. These conditions contribute to depressive behavior (Grills & Ollendick, 2002). According to Beyers and Loeber (2003), each type of disorder is associated with an elevated risk for the others. Although urban adolescents want contact with adults, they often lack sustained relationships with caring adults in schools, homes, and neighborhoods (Grossman & Garry, 1997). High school teachers struggle with large classes that inhibit their ability to pay adequate attention to all students. Without adequate contact, teachers cannot explain what education can offer or address self-destructive behavior. Media images, bullying, and lack of meaningful contact with adults deprive children of the capacity to acquire a meaningful education.

Bullying and School Responses

Educators, school administrators, and social activists identify the concept of bullying as a means of calling attention to continuing problems in environments that are conducive to violence. One aspect of bullying is violence, as physical bullying creates hostile environments for all students and promotes social disruption. Bullying can occur physically or covertly via shunning social behavior. Regardless of the form, it contributes to environments where the fear of continuous threat is pervasive. It is possible that a learned response to bullying behavior is to act aggressively (Bandura, 1997). According to Addington (2009), bullying is a sign of potentially worse problems involving violence in many schools.

Reason for bullying include lack of interest in school, depression, family problems, history of bullying, gang involvement, low self-esteem, obsession with violent

games, and self-isolation (Crick & Bigbee, 1998). Although the most extreme forms of violence are not frequent, the threat of all kinds of violence can promote the development of a mean world syndrome in students, which discourages them from attending school and creates conditions of fear when they do attend (Addington, 2009). Students bringing weapons and drugs to school and joining gang activities can be dangerous according to educators, administrators, and students themselves. Despite interest in more robust security and disciplinary measures, efforts do not consider needs of all stakeholders in the school system and community (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008). Zero tolerance and security system implementation seem to decrease students' privacy rather than make schools safer and more amenable to learning (Addington, 2009). This means that students' rights are precarious due to increased baseless searches and monitoring. In addition to the growing use of measures to monitor students, new technologies, such as webcams and RFID tracking, appear to increase the level of intrusion (Addington, 2009). Some students are unfairly targeted as security risks and disciplinary challenges due to zero tolerance policies (Kupchik & Ellis, 2008). African American, Latino, and Latina students, particularly males, perceive school safety practices to be less fair overall, less well communicated, and less evenly applied compared to White students.

An outcome of these discriminatory school policies is that certain students, particularly those from minority groups, are more likely to experience socioeconomic exclusion and be targeted as possible perpetrators of violence, irrespective of whether they pose a threat. Alternative and less-intensive approaches to discipline and security need to be considered (Kajs, 2006). Zero tolerance and associated security measures are

one-size-fits-all approaches to managing discipline (Kajs, 2006). This means they fail to consider social, economic, and personal differences that lead students to make poor choices concerning their behaviors at school. According to Kajs (2006), "corrective measures that address the particular student and surrounding circumstances of the incident would serve as a more appropriate approach" p. 21). Without this more common sense approach to these challenges, students' ability to thrive may be curtailed in the short and long term (Kajs, 2006). Educator discretion in terms of applying appropriate disciplinary actions for students is more likely to lead to positive behavioral changes and meet the school mission to educate all students equally.

Programs Designed to Address Violence in Schools

The web of education and societal problems described above is deep and difficult to solve (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Indeed, money is needed to repair schools and neighborhoods and create youth jobs. How schools and other public agencies approach social problems is needed. Educators and other professionals need to make broader connections. Although few believe that educational efforts and isolation from the surrounding society can solve the problem of violence inside schools, there is widespread faith that some changes can make a positive difference (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). As a result of this faith, many strategies being tried in schools around the country have improved safety. Typically, a school's responsive action to violence or bullying is found in the form of punishment, in which students lose rights or privileges commensurate to the infraction's nature (Sugai & Horner, 2008). Punishment removes the participatory element of action and restricts the student's control over his or her actions. Responding

with punishment, however, has been seen as problematic as it does not instruct students in an appropriate behavior that adults in a normal society use to mediate conflict or dispute, such as opening a dialogue to find common ground (Sugai & Horner, 2008). Responding with punishment, however, has been seen as problematic as it does not instruct students in an appropriate behavior that adults in a normal society use to mediate conflict or dispute, such as opening a dialogue to find common ground (Sugai & Horner, 2008).

School discipline models are usually classified as authoritative or democratic (Tauber, 2007). Positive characteristics are associated with authoritative discipline, including an easy method for maintaining control (Absler, 2002). This model works in other organizations, such as prisons and boot camps, and creates an atmosphere where individuals adhere to the same standards and consequences. Consequently, authoritative discipline leaves little room for unfairness and biases. Most researchers contend that the authoritative discipline model will usually make most students conform in front of the authority figure. In contrast, without an authority figure, students tend to revert to their previous behavior (Absler, 2002). This is because research has suggested that many students found school to be limiting and frustrating; many of these frustrated and isolated youths began to "wreak havoc on those social institutions that most directly rejected them." Therefore, school disturbance resulted from their frustration (Luna, 2002). To this end, this model can end up in resentment and uprisings from students who cannot govern themselves without a guard (Absler, 2002).

Conversely, it hinges on teaching students to engage in self-governance (Absler, 2002). PM programs are the most frequently used democratic method strategies. Counseling and training are significant components of the democratic discipline model. With democratic discipline, students are guided in discussion and reasoning to help them comprehend why they are expected to act in a particular way. Punishment is not automatic and is applied only at appropriate times when a child outright refuses to comply with a request (Absler, 2002). Unlike authoritative discipline models, the democratic method rewards and praises students when they reach an expected standard (Absler, 2002). In addition, teachers must understand how to engage students in meaningful learning activities and channel students' energies. Most researchers who support the democratic discipline model believe that it allows students to self-govern, develop independence in thinking and reasoning, use logical thought processes to work through problems, employ alternative solutions to problems, and be more friendly and receptive to behavioral guidance (Tauber, 2007). The social learning theory reinforces this approach by modeling appropriate behaviors within students in line with the assertion that learning from observation is more efficient and occurs through moderation in which the cognitive process follows the observation. Just as violent conduct and aggression are often learned through mutual and continuous interaction with their environment, in the form of observation or direct experience, so is the capacity to assimilate desirable traits among the students.

Democratic discipline is needed because adolescent development research shows that students are looking to develop autonomy from adult figures while at the same time

maintaining a sense of relatedness with those individuals they identify as important (Allen et al., 1994). Additionally, Allen et al. (1994) pointed out that challenges erupt (namely, poor social choices) when this balance needs to be managed better by teens and that promoting autonomy and relatedness within adolescent groups may help to alleviate these challenges. This developmental approach to teen behavioral issues is well documented but only sometimes utilized at the school level because it may challenge the existing power structure in schools. School administrators may not be willing to allow counselors leeway to help students explore their autonomy because of the challenges that philosophy may cause. Instead, in high schools, the focus is placed on preventative measures concerning drug use and other social issues. However, as Allen et al. (1994) noted, interventions targeting specific unwanted behaviors, such as drug use, must be completed at a specific stage of development in early adolescence, before high school.

As Galassi and Akos (2004) stated in the academic literature on the counseling profession, developmental theory and research on resiliency and positive youth development that could inform these comprehensive counseling programs in important ways have yet to be considered. There is an explicit limitation in the literature and within the profession regarding efficacy in assisting students faced with conflict and other social issues. Gerler (1992) questioned whether differences in help-seeking behavior within the student population are considered in high school counseling programs; how does help-seeking behavior affect whether a student will be open to counseling or peer mediation? At the same time, Galassi and Akos (2007) determined gaps within the profession, noting that many high school counselors need to gain a fundamental ability in childhood and

adolescent development principles. This means that students seeking help are less likely to turn to their counselors for assistance within this context. However, by providing a model for the students, they are more likely to follow, and role modeling is an essential factor in promoting changes in behavior (Bandura, 1997). Such a perspective ties in with the ideals of the social learning theory in that it is focused on leveraging learning to equip the students with the desired traits.

Despite the approach's appeal, it presents many challenges for counselors and schools. For instance, according to Windle et al. (1991), students undergoing behavioral challenges such as drug use and abuse may demonstrate different developmental stages than those who do not. Moreover, these students' social structure and development range from social isolation to peer interaction and adult social networks (Windle et al., 1991). This means that without the tools to recognize and isolate developmental progression in teens, high school guidance counselors may fail in their role to assist individual students that are at risk. Dysfunctional development can be a crucial indicator of these challenges, but because many teens will not seek the help of their own accord, their issues will remain hidden. Therefore, peer assistance remains one of the most effective counseling outlets that most middle and high schools have available. Hence, peer mediation managers are essential for peer counselors by providing them with relevant insights on conducting themselves, making them good role models for the students in alleviating school violence.

This is why comprehensive student assistance programs are important in combating conflicts within schools (Galassi & Akos, 2004; Sink & MacDonald, 1998).

These include cognitive awareness of resolving personal and social challenges and developing social, cultural, and life navigation skills. A peer counseling framework, which can assist in this process, involves self-development in the long term through the integration of roles, settings, and events in a person's life (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). How individual students fit into many different progressive development models helps teachers and counselors, including peer counselors, effectively support at-risk students. Windle et al. (1991) noted that this is especially important for schools with multiple cultures represented because help-seeking behaviors are profoundly different based on the ethnic or cultural background of students. Crucially, the most frequently used democratic method approaches for promoting internalized social change towards the eradication of violent conduct in school include peer mediation programs, conflict resolution programs, substance prevention abuse rehabilitation and knowledge, bully-proofing schools, resolving conflict creatively programs, drug abuse resistance education, as well as peer support (Johnson & Johnson, 2000; Galassi & Akos, 2004). These programs are described in the subsequent sections.

PM

Peer Mediation (PM) programs grew out of other programs, such as Resolving Conflict Creatively in the New York City Public Schools, developed by attorneys and child advocates in the mid-1970s (Bodine & Crawford, 1998). PM is a method that teaches student mediators strategies to help resolve conflict among their peers. Peer mediation provides a way to resolve conflicts peacefully. PM teaches students alternative

skills to apply in conflict situations (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). PM is one of the most frequently used skill-based approaches to conflict resolution in schools.

Resolving Conflicts Creatively

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) in New York City is a school-based primary prevention program that begins in kindergarten and extends through the 12th grade. The program promotes constructive conflict resolution and positive intergroup relations, reducing early social-cognitive and behavioral risks for later aggression and violence (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). This program is currently being implemented in over 60 New York City schools and replicated in 12 other school systems nationwide by the RCCP National Center. The RCCP aims to transform the culture of classrooms and schools, providing children with an environment with similar opportunities for social-emotional learning as traditional academic subjects. The peer mediation component of the RCCP gives children opportunities to use the conflict resolution skills they have learned. According to Ray et al. (1996), by selecting and training students in conflict resolution skills, the peer mediation component of the RCCP encourages students to be actively involved in creating a peaceful school environment.

Bully-Proofing

The Bully-Proofing Your School Program, educates all children, especially those who are victims of bullies, to stand up for themselves (Garrity et al., 2004). Strategies are taught and reinforced by school personnel to support these victims. The program stresses that bullying behavior is not to be tolerated or admired. The main idea is to help the majority of children to be friends with the target child, stand up to the bully, and make

their school safe for all. Borba (2001) suggested to parents to boost children's confidence and help children resolve conflicts without losing face or resorting to violence. Bully-Proofing embraced Borba's essential virtues to teach kids to do the right thing. She informed parents to do the following:

1. Listen and gather facts.
2. Teach a bully-proofing strategy:
    a) Assert yourself; that is, say to the bully, "Stop it."
    b) Question the response; that is, "Why would you say that?";
    c) Use "I want" message; that is, " I want you to leave me alone.";
    d) Agree with the teaser; that is, "Yeah, but I'm good at it.";
    e) Ignore it; that is, walk away without looking at them; and
    f) Making fun of the teasing; that is, "Thanks for telling me."
3. Rehearse the strategy with your child.
    a) Cool down when you confront the bully;
    b) Assert yourself;
    c) Look at the teaser straight in the eye; and
    d) Mean it! Use a firm, strong voice.

The common perception underlying these democratic method programs designed to relieve social pressures is that the school environment needs to be protected to facilitate a practical, engaged learning experience. Children deserve a safe learning setting; teachers and staff deserve a safe workplace, and communities need safe schools to educate their children. The attitudes of those running the mediation programs to reduce violence are

equally important (Sellman, 2002). How the peer mediation programs are conducted reveals the effectiveness of the program. Thus, the major research question to be explored concerns the attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and experiences of high school personnel in established high school peer mediation programs.

Substance Prevention Abuse Rehabilitation and Knowledge

Substance Prevention Abuse Rehabilitation and Knowledge (SPARK) is a counseling program in conjunction with the New York City Department of Education established in most New York City public schools to help troubled youths with issues such as drug and substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and others (Goldberg, 1994). The SPARK program provides participants with a support group to talk openly about issues they would not typically discuss with others. They learn to communicate, listen to each other, respect each other, and not pass judgment. In this process of revealing, they learn about themselves and develop their self-esteem. In addition, SPARK conducts classes on HIV, condoms, and other health-related issues. They meet with their SPARK counselor every week three times a week (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Hence, the SPARK program focuses on enhancing troubled children's health outcomes.

Drug Abuse Resistance Education

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) is a collaborative effort with law enforcement officers, educators, students, parents, and the community to offer an educational program in the classroom to prevent or reduce drug abuse and violence among children and youths (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). The objective is to help students resist the many pressures that influence them to experiment with alcohol, tobacco,

marijuana, inhalants, or other drugs or to engage in violence. The DARE program is taught by a trained law enforcement officer assigned to the school one day a week for one semester to conduct weekly lessons. The program is incorporated into other health, science, social studies, language, arts, or as appropriate instruction. In addition, DARE offers preventive strategies to enhance those protective factors, for example, bonding with the family, school, and community, which appears to foster the development of resiliency in young people who may be at risk for substance abuse or other problem behaviors. Nonetheless, research has shown that DARE is ineffective in reducing violence or drug abuse, particularly among students (Hahn et al., 2007).

Peer Support

The Peer Support program is an educational organization committed to improving the quality of life of school students through peer group influence. The aims are to help primary and secondary school students develop self-esteem and self-awareness, resist peer group pressure, adjust quickly to a new school, and promote responsibility, self-confidence, and leadership qualities (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

History of PM

PM is a form of conflict resolution based on integrative negotiation and mediation (Guanci, 2002; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). The disputing parties communicate to find a mutually satisfying solution to their disagreement, and a neutral third party facilitates the resolution process. The main feature of peer mediation is that it is carried out entirely by students and for students. Due to increased violence in schools, the rise of a serious crime committed by youths, and the increasing need for social skill instruction in education,

peer mediation programs exploded in the 1980s. In 1984, when the National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) was formed, there were about 50 mediation programs in school districts nationwide. Eleven years later, NAME reported over 5,000 programs across the country. NAME brought together educators and mediators working in neighborhood justice centers to consider how best to teach about mediation and conflict resolution. The mediation effort in schools was also spurred by the development of local programs that have gained national statures, such as the Community Board local programs in San Francisco and the New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution based in Albuquerque (NAME, 1994). Others are the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) in New York City, International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution, Peaceful Endings through Attorneys, Children, and Educators in Indiana State and at Teachers' College, Columbia University National Institute for Dispute Resolution in Washington D.C., and Mediators' Alternative Resolution Smart Team (SMART).

Peer mediation programs are taught starting at elementary grade levels (Lam, 1988; Lantieri & Patti, 1996). Students' mediators are taught an interest-based negotiation procedure, communication, and problem-solving strategies to help their peers settle disagreements without confrontation or violence. They learn to listen effectively, summarize accurately, and think critically. Furthermore, they develop problem-solving, leadership, and writing skills to help foster meaningful discussion among disputants. In a training session, the mediators identify the interests beneath the surface positions in dispute. In the training process, mediators learn that conflict can be resolved constructively, and their roles as mediators are not to pass judgment or force an

agreement or solution. The disputants involved in mediation also learn many skills. The program intends that they can resolve their problems without resorting to violence; they learn empathy, how to view the problem in the eyes of the other person; they learn to respect and communicate effectively with others. Moreover, the social learning theory model is tied into this process as the students learn appropriate modeling.

Comprehension of Conflict in the Context of PM

Johnson and Johnson (1996) referred to the conflict as an unavoidable part of everyday life. Unresolved and lingering conflict frequently leads to violence, interfering with productivity and the quality of life in schools and the community. Often, wrong assumptions and misperceptions are responsible for starting many conflicts. When people do not understand the motives or behavior of another's action, they often resort to stereotypes, name-calling, gossiping, and even confrontation, which take the form of verbal and physical abuse. Simpson (1998) summarized the four types of conflict that exist. Intrapersonal conflict arises from within you—a conflict between your "real" self and the "ideal" self-picture you have of yourself. Interpersonal conflict occurs between two or more people. Interpersonal conflict may arise over psychological needs and differing beliefs or resources. Intragroup conflict arises within a large group's context but occurs between two or more people. For example, people working together to support a political candidate may differ in how they want to run the campaign. Intragroup conflict is complex to solve because it does not satisfy the needs of the two participants, but all the other members of this particular group may be affected. Intergroup conflict arises out

of the conflict between two or more groups. Gang warfare is a good example of intergroup conflict (Simpson, 1998).

Out of conflict comes the process of mediation. Mediation is an intervention by a third party to settle a conflict that the participants have been unable to resolve (Daunic & Smith, 2010; Simpson, 1998). The person intervening is called a mediator, trained to help two or more people resolve a conflict or disagreement. Wolowiec (1994) stated that conflicts are not always minor and harmless. Either way, mediation involves solving the dispute through peaceful means. McGarrell (2001) stated that the mediator plays a special role by not taking the position of a judge, deciding right or wrong, or finding a person guilty or innocent. A mediator tries to help the disputants find an agreeable and peaceful way to resolve their conflict. Peer mediators handle disputes from student disagreements, poor attendance, and sometimes trouble between teacher and student. In such situations, the peer mediators are paired with an adult mediator to provide guidance (Daunic & Smith, 2010). Simpson (1998) and Johnson and Johnson (1996) highlighted the types of conflict handled by student mediators, including gossiping, borrowing things and not returning them or returning them in worse conditions, bullying others or being bullied, relationship issues, and fighting.

Strengths and Weaknesses of PM

Several studies have highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of peer mediation programs. O'Donnell (1999) concluded that even elementary students could benefit from peer mediation programs. The students reported that the skills they learned during their peer mediation training were helpful and valuable. They reported using the skills

immediately after the training for problem-solving during school and non-school time. They identified themselves as problem solvers on open-ended questions. They listed their peers and family as primary resources for assistance with conflict and indicated that they would choose peer mediation for conflict resolution. Lindsay (1998) studied the effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in four public schools, including elementary, middle, and high schools, compared to three schools without such programs. Teachers and other school personnel were interviewed and surveyed by mail. The results indicate that the schools using the conflict resolution and peer mediation programs reported improvement in school discipline and curriculum as opposed to the three schools not using the peer mediation program. The teachers also reported having gained valuable skills in teaching and class management. Additionally, the students participated in activities, which enabled them to take responsibility for their actions.

Effects of PM on Students and Teachers

Bush (2001) conducted a study on the effects of peer mediation in middle and high schools. He included three groups of populations: Hispanic-American, African-American, and Haitian-American. The study was conducted during 1993–1994 and 1998–1999 in middle school and 1992–1993 and 1998–1999 in high school. A conflict resolution program was instituted in the curricula, specifically peer mediation. Bush (2001) endeavored to find out if the inclusion of the conflict resolution intervention would reduce or extinguish violent or aggressive behavior in at-risk students by at least a 30% decline during the study years. The results indicate that both schools had decreased levels of violence over 5-year (middle school) and 6-year (high school) periods. The

middle school showed a decline of 19.3%, and the high school showed a decline of 16%. The scores indicate a decrease in violent and aggressive incidents (physical or verbal fights requiring administrative intervention) from 574 in middle schools 1993–1994 school year to 463 in the 1998–1999 school year. The high school showed a similar decrease in violent or aggressive incidents from 431 in the 1992–1993 school year to 362 in the 1998–1999 school year. Although neither school reached the 30% benchmark, statistics show that the continuity of conflict resolution using peer mediation is very promising and that both schools may be able to reach the 30%reduction rate or higher.

While the general school population may benefit from mediation, the students who gain the most from the programs are the peer mediators (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Shulman, 1996; Stomfay-Stitz, 1994). Peer mediators from different programs can express problems and develop positive problem-solving skills, better communication patterns, and improved self-image. The authors reported other benefits attributed to mediators, including improved student behavior, increased peer status, academic improvement, enhanced leadership skills, higher self-esteem, and better resolution of problems at school and home. Peer mediators reported that although they enjoyed being peer mediators, there were also negative aspects to peer mediation. Some of the problems mentioned by the peer mediators include missing recess while on duty, being unable to help in every situation, wearing an identification badge, losing a friend, being teased, and being antagonized by students who are not mediators. Some peer mediators reported that when mediating a problem involving a friend, they were expected to favor their friend. Other negative aspects include a case when disputants tried to engage them in fights—in

addition, being unpopular posed problems for the mediators. For example, if the mediator were not well-liked, the disputants would be unwilling to let the mediator help them resolve their problems.

The study revealed that peer mediation has benefits, and its popularity has markedly increased as a suitable tool for addressing violent conduct among students. When students were asked whom they would most likely go to for help with an interpersonal conflict, most reported they would seek out a friend. A small percentage reported that peer mediation would be their choice. The students reported that they were aware of the peer mediation program in the school. Over half of the respondents indicated they had been involved in an interpersonal conflict in the last six months. However, a small percentage used peer mediation services to solve their problems because peer mediation programs usually carry little weight in the school. Similar findings were reported for faculty members. About 96% reported that they knew the school had a peer mediation program and believed it was important to have a peer-based conflict resolution program. However, when asked if they would refer students involved in a dispute to peer mediation, the majority indicated that they were not likely to do so with no explanation to follow. Only a small percentage had ever recommended the service to students. Of the students who have used peer mediation to help solve an interpersonal conflict, a high percentage believed that the service was helpful. About half responded that they would be apt to use the service in the future and would likely recommend it to a friend. That indicates PM's growing popularity and willingness to use it in combating violent conduct.

Barron (1999) revealed that while peer mediation promotes positive attitudes and behavior, culture might play a role in how one responds to a particular environment. The impact of peer mediation training did not influence peer mediators' problem-solving skills, perception of learning, school environment, and attitude toward conflict management. Peer mediation programs are ineffective with young children because young children do not have the cognitive capacities to apply creative problem-solving skills incorporated in a peer mediation program (Johnson & Johnson, 2001). Participation in peer mediation did not influence the affective traits of the child mediators. According to Heerboth (2000), modifying teachers' behaviors, increasing the school's focus on the needs of students, and attempting to modify student behavior positively correlated with perceptions of program success.

Long-term support and an evaluation component were also positively correlated with the perception of success. Smith and Daunic (2010) discussed how perceptions and behaviors could impact change. The participants, who were teachers, principals, superintendents, and support staff, reflected that poor communication, difficult inter-relationships, lack of time, and weak leadership adversely affected the success of the implementation. They concluded that people weigh potential benefits versus perceived costs and risks when they make a change. If the implementation is in progress, people assess the value of their participation in the change. If they do not perceive the satisfaction of remaining involved as more significant than their costs and risks, they will discontinue their involvement in the change. Smith and Daunic (2010) stated that people would engage in behavior toward successful change only if it serves their values of self-

esteem, pride, respect, safety, recognition, and power. Sellman (2002) analyzed some factors that make peer mediation programs ineffective, weak, or sustainable. He summarized that peer mediation frequently fails because programs must be compatible with existing school cultures and their vision. Sellman also indicated that teachers' unwillingness to modify their views of authority and to model the relevant skills themselves is another obstacle contributing to peer mediation's failure.

Sellman (2002) further elaborated that the school needs to launch a synergy service where the entire school implements the peer mediation program. It becomes a clash when peer mediation becomes a discrete entity. Peer mediation should be viewed not solely as a vehicle for dealing with conflict but as part of a much broader review of school culture and its relationship to the reproduction of violence and aggression. In addition, teachers' behaviors concerning conflicts experienced at school and how they are handled should be part of a whole school review. Sellman concluded that peer mediation is more sustainable as part of a long-term systemic analysis of school development.

Peer mediation is a promising strategy for improving school tone and environment (Bodine & Crawford, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Lantieri & Patti, 1996). The use of peer mediation can substantially change students' approaches and settle conflicts. Tolson et al. (1990) conducted a study on the effectiveness of peer mediation among high school students. They reported that the impact of a school-based peer mediation program on disputants revealed that students who received mediation were referred significantly less for other interpersonal conflicts than students who received traditional school discipline. Johnson and Johnson (1996) said that many schools report

that student mediations help solve large numbers of disputes and that the disputes remain settled in most cases. Often, the best student mediators are those who have been considered troublemakers. Teachers report fewer fights and more caring student behaviors. Administrators notice improved attendance and a decrease in the number of school suspensions. Johnson et al. (1992) reported that students transfer the mediation techniques learned in school to settings beyond the classroom. Students have reported using their mediation skills to resolve disputes at home with their siblings, other family members, and peers. Implementing peer mediation programs can be associated with fewer fights, fewer referrals to the dean's office, and a decreased rate of school suspension (Charney, 1998; Simpson, 1998; Thompson, 1996).

Lantieri and Patti (1996) concluded that peer mediation provides students with skills to last a lifetime. It provides them with communication skills, listening skills, leadership skills, empathy skills, negotiating skills, and creative problem-solving skills. As students learn to master these skills, they apply them daily in their everyday life, be it at school, home, or work. They develop maturity, increase self-confidence, and apply good decision-making skills with practice. Peer mediation plays a significant role in encouraging youths to resolve disputes peacefully. Peer mediation provides them a chance to voice their concerns and offer solutions. Mediators and troubled youths work together to resolve the problem. Peer mediators encourage the disputants to brainstorm possible solutions. In meditating, peer mediators have been shown to increase self-esteem and even improve academic achievement. It is a win-win situation for both mediators and disputants. They both learn strategies to handle conflict constructively before resorting to

violence. These skills, in turn, lead to other positive outcomes: increased self-esteem, increased maturity, positive attitude, increased appreciation of others, and improved school climate. All these skills require that the students model appropriate behaviors, which ties into the social learning theory.

PM Models

Several experts on peer mediation have examined different peer mediation models. Johnson and Johnson (1994) presented a total school model where all students have the opportunity to be taught the principles and practices of conflict resolution, and all students have the opportunity to function as mediators. The advantages are that all students can learn how to manage conflicts constructively; the severity and frequency of conflicts may decease by having everyone trained; the experience of being a mediator would reinforce the concepts and skills of conflict management. According to Johnson and Johnson (1994), the weaknesses of the total school model are the following: It would require a lot of time and commitment from the faculty and administration; it is costly; it seems most appropriate for the elementary school where teachers have the same students for most of the day, and mediators and mediation can be made available in classrooms or for schools with a small number of students and a low teacher-to-student ratio; it is challenging to implement, operate, and monitor a total school mediation program in a large high school or middle school where the staff has less frequent contact with a particular group of students.

Graham and Cline (1998) presented an "elective course model." In this model, a new course in mediation could be taught as part of the social studies curriculum. Several

schools are presently using the elective course model for a group of students as part of an elective course, such as Peer Discovery and Conflict Resolution. The mediation program coordinator usually teaches these elective courses and operates on a high school level. The advantage of this model is that class time would provide a consistent setting for training mediators and conducting mediations. Also, an ongoing class would provide other opportunities for instruction on related topics and further leadership development. The depth of training would ease the scheduling of mediations and provide access to mediators for follow-up. The disadvantage of this model is that mediators would be selected only from those students who can enroll in the course. The diversity of the student population would not be well represented because only a limited number of students could enroll. In addition, if mediation is restricted to the time of day when the class meets, this could be another weakness.

Day-Vines et al. (1996) presented a student club model. It involves selecting mediators from the entire student body, bringing them together at a time, and placing them outside their regular school curriculum. Training would be conducted after school or on weekends. Mediations would be scheduled before, during lunch, or after school. The advantage of the student club model is the ability to select mediators from the school population who will represent the total student body. It also allows recruiting students who traditionally do not get involved in school activities or are classified as at-risk. The mediation program would bring benefits to these students, and these students would bring benefits to others by bringing in diverse perspectives and experiences. Some of the disadvantages of the student club model are as follows: The depth of training and

frequency of support for mediators may not be as great as with the elective course model; the coordinators of the program would need to be creative when confronted with space and scheduling issues because the student club model would permit more students to become involved.

Training of Students and Faculty in PM

Ground rules are essential to establish in peer mediation. Mediators are selected by teachers, administrators, counselors, the student body, and former disputants (Potter, 1996; Thompson, 1996). They undergo training. It helps the session run smoothly. Simpson (1998) and Wolowiec (1994) listed the following ground rules in mediation:

1. Both sides agree to listen to each other without interruption or name-calling.
2. Both sides agree to work together on a solution.
3. Both sides agree to keep what transpired in their meeting confidential.

However, beyond these rules, mediation training is varied based on institutions. Some schools either ask an outside organization, such as a community mediation center, to train the students, or they use their peer mediation staff personnel. The latter option requires that these staff coordinators receive mediation training first. The training for the staff personnel is conducted by an outside professional organization specializing in conflict resolution in schools. The mediation coordinators undergo a series of training for a couple of months.

Training is viewed as necessary due to the difficulty in changing adult attitudes and behavior, and it requires input and participation from many different school stakeholders. According to Nickerson and Spears (2007):

> The finding that better mental health professional-to-student ratios predicted the use of violence prevention programs, student involvement in resolving conflict, and parent training is likely to be of great interest to school psychologists. These data may be used to advocate for the increased presence of school psychologists, counselors, and other mental health professionals to provide a wide variety of mental health services in schools. In addition, it appears that parent training and involvement may be an important area to enhance in high-crime areas. (p. 26)

Without sufficient training to address the teachers' behaviors, there is a danger that the adults' words will not match their actions (Nickerson & Spears, 2007). In 23 studies, 4,028 of 4,327 mediations ended in agreement (93%) when a training program involving teachers and students was introduced (Burrell et al., 2003). This indicates the success of mediation programs within the schools, mainly when empathy-based training systems are used (Cantrell et al., 2007).

Since modeling is essential and consistent with the theoretical framework, gaining insight and specific forms of training are viewed as essential (Bell et al., 2000). Part of the framework for training includes learning how to teach conflict resolution and mediation classes (Cantrell et al., 2007). Upon completing the training, the staff personnel receive certificates enabling them to run a conflict resolution or peer mediation program. The peer mediators receive 15–20 hours of training and activities to improve their communication and negotiation techniques with these staff members (Bell et al., 2000). They are given instructions and provided activities designed to build skills in

active listening, critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, leadership, writing, assertiveness, teamwork, the conflict manager/mediation process, and negotiation skills.

The training activities require that the students participate in group discussions about conflict resolution, problem-solving, and role plays about conflict situations. They have the opportunity to share their abilities and experiences and also learn from one another. At the end of their training sessions, the peer mediators are given a written test of their ability to remember the mediation process and understand their roles (i.e., as judges or disciplinarians). They are required to know the four steps of mediation:

1. introducing themselves as mediators
2. provide the four rules of conduct for disputants to follow (do not interrupt each other, do not call names, tell the truth about the incident, and agree to solve the problem)
3. defining the problem as each disputant perceived it and discussing their feelings
4. finding a mutually satisfying solution to the problem (Bell et al., 2000)

In addition, peer mediators undergo ongoing follow-up training on bias awareness, cultural diversity, and issues of power. It is also recommended to have peer mediators of different backgrounds to match with the student population. Once advisors feel that the peer mediators are ready, then they are assigned a case as a mediator in the presence of a peer advisor. Resolving disputes requires putting one's own judgments and feelings above an issue, facilitating discussion and fact finding, being positive, listening carefully, and offering encouragement (NAME, 1994).

The mediation process begins with gathering information about the situation. Simpson (1998) and Potter (1996) summarized several techniques for gathering information:

- Active listening technique fosters understanding, builds rapport, and develops empathy. There are two types of active listening. (a)Nonverbal active listening—giving your full attention by nodding and maintaining eye contact without staring; and (b)Verbal active listening—repeating the ambiguous words in phrases in what the disputant has said and using phrases, such as "I see," "go on," and "I want to understand."
- Check-out technique confirms the understanding of what the disputant has said. There are three types of check-outs: (a) Specific check-out is designed to identify a specific example of what the disputant might mean, (b) General check-out aims to identify what common details the disputant has listed and then to present a tentative conclusion. General check-out helps the mediator pull out the disputant's general concern from what initially seems like a lot of unrelated complaints, and (c) Feeling check-out confirms the understanding of how the disputants feel about the situation. The mediator would formulate a conclusion or theory about the disputant's feelings, and then the conclusion is verified with the disputant.
- Probe technique is an open-ended question beginning with "what," "when," "where," "who," "in what way," "under what condition," and "how." It cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." For example, What happened today? How did it happen? The following two questions are considered powerful questions:

What happened? What did he (she) do (say)? With these questions, you can obtain considerable information from a disputant, even if you know nothing about that person or the situation.

- The silence technique can help gather information in a conflict interview. There is something about silence that makes people uncomfortable, especially when they do not know one another well. They usually break the silence with small talk. Silence is used most effectively when the disputant has been on the topic and winds down.
- The review and sum up technique summarize what the disputant has said, followed by a check-out. It is a powerful technique with many uses. It signals how long to interview one disputant and when to move on to the next one's story. It also helps set the stage for mediation. For example, summarize the points in the disputant's story and then ask if there is anything else. When each disputant has agreed with your summary of his or her story, this time, do not ask if there is anything else; start the mediation.

Concomitantly, although this approach is still considered the foundation to begin training (Cantrell et al., 2007), there are training methods that can augment this approach. For example, according to Mytton et al. (2009):

> Interventions designed to improve the relationship or social skills appear to be the most beneficial. The type of intervention components delivered, either to individuals or groups, during a relationship or social skills training included how to develop good relationships and get on with others by such skills as listening,

> learning to respond positively to the feelings of yourself and others, understanding how your behavior affects the way that other people relate to you, how to work cooperatively with others, or how to assert yourself constructively. (p. 12)

This means that the training framework should focus on the process and creating a culture of empathy. To this end, offering peer mediation training to all student body members and allowing them to nominate and select the peer mediators themselves and initiate the model may augment the success of any such program (Turnuklu et al., 2010). Moreover, peer mediator training should also consider student participants' needs (Turnuklu et al., 2010). Different students' cultural, ethnic, racial, and gender backgrounds may affect how they respond to different mediation approaches. Concerning gender, for example, promising to stop the offending behavior was more prevalent among male students while negotiating an agreement was predominantly seen among female students. Avoidance and not talking were more prevalent types of agreement in male–female conflict (Turnuklu et al., 2010). Student peer mediators who are better prepared to manage these differences in approaches to a conflict will be better able to mitigate their peers' needs.

Summary

Sociologists, psychiatrists, and educational theorists have critically defined the need to eliminate school violence. Violence and aggression appear to be transmitted socially and are frequently exhibited as learned responses. Bullying is an expression of violence and can have a direct negative impact on students. Studies strongly suggest that if aggressive behaviors are not reduced or eliminated in school settings, they will continue to propagate among students. Efforts have been made to identify specific

socioenvironmental concerns within a given school setting and reduce negative factors that lead to bullying. PM efforts have been identified in literature as having a positive nurturing impact on the target population. Research indicates PM programs lead to improved school climate, increased campus safety, reduced violence, and decreased disciplinary referrals and suspension rates in schools (Bell et al., 2000). The success of PM programs is not automatic. It may depend on how well the program is planned and carried out (Bodine & Crawford, 2001). A Prior planning is necessary, and many logistical decisions should be made beforehand. The training of peer mediators is another integral component lead to success of PM programs.

During training, students must learn the basic principles of PM. They are taught communication and problem-solving strategies to help themselves and others defuse conflicts. In addition, role-playing and active learning are essential during training so that student mediators can learn skills to help peers move from mutual blame toward solutions that are acceptable to all parties. Even after PM has been established, ongoing program monitoring is essential (Daunic & Smith, 2010). Thus, for PM to be most effective, it should be part of a whole school effort. It is highly likely that PM programs are not universal and must be tailored to given circumstances or educational settings. There is also a gap in the literature regarding performance of program managers in PM and their effect on program success (Cantrell et al., 2007; Nickerson & Spears, 2007; Turnuklu et al., 2010). More literature is needed on program managers' involvement in PM programs. The present study suggests that program managers' perceptions, thoughts, attitudes, and

experiences directly impact PM programs they facilitate. Chapter 3 includes the methodology, research design, role of the researcher, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

PM programs have been critically identified as alleviating challenges involving managing school violence and bullying. However, attitudes and knowledge of people involved in the PM process have yet to be explored. I focused on mediation in New York City from the point of view of school personnel who work or have worked in peer mediation programs. I explored managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences in terms of running peer mediation programs.

Qualitative Methodology

This study involved using the phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a qualitative approach that involves focusing subjective experiences (feelings, impressions, thoughts, and perceptions) and subjective interpretations of human activities. Gall et al. (2007) stated phenomenological research is experiential and qualitative. Using this approach, researchers can identify unique experiences of participants, enabling them to view a problem from different perspectives. The phenomenological approach to obtaining data allows research participants to recount their personal experiences (DeLazzlo, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative researchers seek connections involving phenomena under study, involved participants, and their personal experiences, as well as their feelings and thoughts. This enables researchers to tell stories about a subject and discuss their subjective experiences regarding a phenomenon (Berliner, 1992). Friere and Macedo (1987) said researchers must strive to determine how participants reconstructed their schema so that they can better understand personal, social, educational, and historical realities of a given fact, particular event, or continuing phenomenon. I designed

an in-depth study of program managers of PM programs in high schools who share the experience of supervising PM programs.

Qualitative researchers generally conduct at least one long interview with each participant to obtain a comprehensive description of their experiences regarding the phenomenon under study (Cooper, 1993). Because the objective of this study was to elicit individuals' thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the context of peer mediation programs, I asked participants of this study to tell me about what they had done, felt, and seen in PM programs. Participants were allowed to say what they wanted to say. Then, their responses were transcribed, and transcriptions were submitted for review and approval. This was done by audiotaping each interview and having it reviewed by me and two other researchers to ensure accuracy of transcriptions.

Personal values of participants are essential in qualitative research because these values are crucial in shaping outcomes of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). An analysis that considers the rich context of individual experiences and values is a thick description (Giorgi, 2006; Stones, 1981). The interview process in a phenomenological study is unstructured but involves gathering data. Interview data for each case are divided into segments or categories. Researchers look for meaningful units and themes in segments. Meaning units and themes are then compared across cases. Finally, case findings are integrated and validated by checking with participants. Giorgi (1985) concluded the interview process in a phenomenological study is comprehensive and can be used to detect aspects experiences that may prove to be important variables and subsequently be used for quantitative studies.

Research Design

The I used in-depth interviews based on the basic phenomenological methodology. This design allows participants to describe details as they perceive them (Giorgi, 1989). This design was suitable for this study because it involved studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to identify patterns and meaningful relationships between participant responses. Through interviews, I identified subjective experiences of school personnel who run established PM programs. Interview questionnaires were used, and all interviews were tape-recorded for accuracy. I conducted two in-person and three phone interviews.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used for the study:

RQ1: What are mediation managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences regarding their roles in PM programs?

RQ2: What strengths are perceived by managers involving current PM programs?

RQ3: What weaknesses are perceived by managers in current PM programs?

Role of the Researcher

I was a former high school guidance counselor at a school in New York City and worked with coordinators of that school's peer mediation program. Via these experiences, I gained some knowledge of how PM programs work. Moreover, for the study, I observed a training session, sat in two conflict resolution classes, and observed a PM session. My interest in the PM program developed because of the benefits that it provided. Some of these benefits include resolving student conflicts that would otherwise

result in suspension, providing a neutral place for students in conflict to air out their feelings, bringing harmony between friends, teaching students alternative ways to cope with their conflicts, teaching students to be peer mediators, and reducing fights in schools. I focused on program managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences involving running PM programs in high schools. There have been many studies on PM and conflict resolution, but there is a lack of information regarding persons who run these programs. This motivated me to conduct this study. I knew two participants as colleagues and did not meet the other three participants before conducting the study.

Methodology

Target Population

Participants were high school personnel who have worked in PM for at least 3 years. The qualified programs were those established for five years or more. The people involved in school peer mediation programs vary from school to school. In some schools, the members are all teachers, but in others, the program comprises teachers, counselors, and deans. Some schools also have supervisors in their programs. Besides the type of school personnel, the number of persons running the peer mediation program also varies and depends on the school.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Several techniques were used to establish trustworthiness of data. I used the audit trail technique to show the dependability and confirmability of the findings. The tape recordings, the transcription, and the summary notes supported corroboration. With the audit trail, I was able to review the recording and notes, compare the transcription, and

analyze the notes with the two other researchers. Debriefing with a peer/colleague was very insightful. A fresh new perspective was brought into the study, given that this peer was not involved. The alternative interpretations of data facilitated much discussion, and it was good for the study to provide more clarity. The participants were accessible and willingly wanted to ensure their thoughts, experiences, and perceptions were recorded accurately. Thus, the member-checking technique worked to my advantage. I checked with the participants occasionally to reduce any error or misinterpretation of their experience of the phenomenon under study. The participants were very cooperative and enthusiastic about the study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical research practices were followed during the process of data collecting, analysis, and documentation. I obtained Walden University Institution Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure ethical procedures in my study. I composed an invitation flyer that explained the nature of my research, participant criteria, and my contact information. The flyer and a letter were sent via e-mail to the principals of those high schools with established peer mediation programs. Those interested in participating in this study were asked to contact me using information provided in the emailed invitation flyer. Upon receiving responses from potential participants. I contacted participants by phone and sent a letter of invitation to the participants to take part in the study.

In my conversation with those participants, I explained the nature of the research, answer questions, discussed participants' right to participate and withdraw from the study at any time. Each participant completed and signed an informed consent form. Pseudo

names were given to participants to ensure confidentiality. Participants were informed that being in this study would not pose risk to their safety or well-being. The likelihood of risk might perhaps be a little bit of stress from answering the interview questions. There was no form of payments for participating in this study other than the satisfaction of knowing that others who are in the field may benefit from their experiences and expertise. Additionally, a thank you letter was sent to each participant to show appreciation.

The protection and privacy of participants were important. I informed participants that the information they provided would be kept confidential; their names or any other information that could identify them in the study reports would not be used. Participants' data were kept in a fireproof locked file cabinet for 5 years and only I had access to the records. Data were kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Summary

Five PM facilitators participated in this phenomenological study. Their perceptions of the PM program and strengths and weaknesses of these programs were explored via interviews. Result of interviews are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, conclusions, recommendations, and social implications of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore program managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences involving their roles in PM programs. Through this study, I also gained a deeper understanding of how mediation managers perceived strengths and weaknesses of their PM programs. Five managers of PM programs were interviewed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are mediation managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences regarding their roles in PM programs?

RQ2: What strengths are perceived by managers involving current PM programs?

RQ3: What weaknesses are perceived by managers in current PM programs?

In this chapter, I discuss the setting and demographic information for participants. Data collection and analysis procedures are also described. Finally, results of this study are presented.

Study Setting

The present study's focus was to detail the nature of PM programs, specifically managers' thoughts on program usefulness in terms of alleviating violent conduct among students. Additionally, I sought to explore program managers' participation and perceptions of the effectiveness of PM programs. Consequently, there was a need to obtain insights from individuals involved in PM programs, particularly program coordinators. For this study, my focus was on undertaking a detailed study of individuals who supervised PM programs in high schools. Recruiting relevant participants made it possible to derive firsthand insights regarding relevance of key indicators such as

attitude, level of training, and level of experience involving PM. Moreover, I addressed the nature of PM within the context of addressing school violence. I enhanced the study's validity by not focusing on participants' personal information, which may have limited their willingness to participate.

Demographics

Five people participated in this study (four women and one man). The population consisted of one English teacher, two social studies teachers, one Spanish teacher and dean, and one home economics teacher and dean. All participants, at one time or another, held the position of dean and received a master's degree. one was African-American, one was Hispanic, and three were Caucasian. Participants were all program coordinators of PM at their schools. They were all trained in PM programs at the same institute and received certificates of training in PM. Their programs have been established for more than 5 years. Table 1 lists information on participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Gender	Number of years working in PM program	Number of years PM program has been in existence
Participant 1	Female	10	20
Participant 2	Female	20	20
Participant 3	Female	14	14
Participant 4	Female	12	12
Participant 5	Male	16	16

Data Collection

I used purposive sampling for this study. According to Vogt (2002), purposive sampling involves sampling individuals who are selected deliberately by researchers,

usually because they have characteristics that are typical or representative of a population. A list of high schools located within the five boroughs of New York City was obtained from a directory of high schools. An email to principals of high schools with PM programs. Principals shared the email with PM program managers at their schools. It included a summary of the study and criteria for qualified individuals to participate. As a former high school guidance counselor in New York City public schools, I had access to school emails. Interested participants sent an email or called me to get clarification or to ask questions regarding the study. Interviews were arranged with participants who qualified and who were willing to participate in the process.

The initial sample population consisted of 15 participants. Criteria were set to ensure validity and substance of data. To establish how participants met criteria, interested participants responded to two qualifying questions: whether they worked in a high school PM program for 3 years or more and whether the PM program in their schools was established for 5 years or more. Only some participants met both criteria. The final sample had five PM leaders from four different urban high schools in the New York City metropolitan region.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data were collected within 2 months after the proposal was approved. Cover letters explaining the study and consent forms were sent, signed, and returned to me before data collection. IRB approval was received. A qualifying list of two questions was sent to participants to verify they could be included in the study. A prescreening test was given to two teachers who were not participants in the study to determine if interview

questions were appropriate for obtaining desired information. This test was essential to improve question clarity and format. The prescreening test enabled me to revise and clarify some interview questions before meeting participants.

Participants' interviews were arranged during a mutually agreeable time. The interviews lasted between an hour and two hours. Interviews were tape-recorded. I transcribed the interviews. I read, analyzed, and reduced data into idiographic themes; two other researchers (a former dissertation chairman and former colleague trained in qualitative methods) collaborated and reviewed analyzed data. I identified patterns and relationships of meaning involving participant responses. I discussed and explored these patterns and relationships in depth with the former dissertation chairman and former colleague, and more ideas evolved through many discussions. The data were divided into two segments: natural meaning units and themes. These units and themes were compared across cases. The units represented the participants' statements combined to express a single and common aspect of the participants' experiences. These units were labeled as idiographic themes to show similar ideas reflecting the experiences across the participants. Once all the themes were identified, they were grouped and arranged in hierarchical order from highest to lowest levels of saturation. The themes were labeled to enable me to unfold the factual aspects of the phenomena, which are the participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences in the context of their peer mediation programs.

Data Analysis

The data collected in the present study were analyzed according to procedures adopted by Giorgi. The first step in the analysis entailed listening to the entire recorded

interviews to obtain a holistic perspective regarding the data. In undertaking the process, I put aside the biases that would ordinarily hamper the validity of such a study. Then I listened to the taped interviews a second time to divide the data into its natural meaning categories based on the interview questions. The categories were representative of the participants' statements, which were integrated to express a single aspect of the participants' experiences. These categories or units are illustrated in a table that shows how participants responded to each category. The categories are depicted in Table 2 in the themes section. The next step in the analysis involved ignoring any natural meaning units irrelevant to the study. Giorgi (1989) referred to it as a self-definable and self-delimiting expression of a single recognized aspect of the subject's experience. I identified the relevant natural meaning units and labeled them idiographic themes to show similar ideas reflecting the participants' experiences. According to Vogt (2002), themes are leveraged to describe research that deals with individual, singular, unique, or concrete experiences.

After taking these steps, I examined the idiographic themes by assuming the role of an impartial and professional evaluator and deciding on the data accuracy. That was followed by grouping all the idiographic themes in hierarchical order based on their frequency of appearance in the interviews. By categorizing the transcribed interviews, it was hoped that many data elements, including patterns, would be uncovered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data were organized into labeled themes and then re-categorized to uncover the true aspects of the PM phenomenon. Finally, I described the resulting themes and their relation to the research questions, with interrelated themes clustered together. In this

study, no discrepant information was identified. All information derived from the interviews was incorporated into the results.

Trustworthiness

The accuracy and trustworthiness of the data were established. The ethical procedures were followed step by step. The proposed strategies to ensure the quality of this study were followed including the use of an audit trait, the debriefing with a peer and colleague during data collection and analysis, and the use of member checking. The data collected were analyzed according to the procedures adopted by Giorgi. The data were divided into two segments: natural meaning units and themes. These units were validated by those participants, and they were labeled as idiographic themes. As Vogt (2002) noted, themes describe individual's unique or concrete experience. Giorgi (1989) described the natural meaning units as self-definable and self-delimiting expression of a single recognized aspect of the subject's experience. Following the data analysis procedures described ensured results genuinely revealed participants' voices.

Results

Many themes were generated from the interviews. They were codified from highest to lowest levels of saturation (Table 2). I identified the relevant natural meaning units, which were statements made by the participants, and these statements were labeled as idiographic themes to reflect the participants' experiences.

Table 2

Themes

Rating	Theme	Meaning
1.	Time	In reference to the time needed to program, promote, and engage students in peer mediation
2.	Support	In reference to the amount of positive support that peer mediation instructors get from their administration
3.	Empowerment	In reference to the effect that the program has on the peer mediators themselves
4.	Life skills	In reference to the effect that the program has on the peer mediators themselves
5.	Social change	In reference to decreases in conflict that educators have seen in their schools over time after the implementation of the program
6	Lack of parental engagement	In reference to either a lack of knowledge or a lack of interest on the part of the parents with respect to peer mediation
7	Training	In reference to the need for ongoing training for both students and staff
8	Necessity of government involvement	In reference to the need for government financial and planning support for peer mediation programs on an ongoing basis

Overall, the findings from the interviews demonstrated that peer mediation programs in middle and high schools were appreciated and helpful in decreasing conflict and changing how students thought about community within their environment. There were indications that, in general, the programs were well-supported by the administration of the schools represented in the study. However, there were concerns that because

programs were not mandated by the local school authorities or government-level programming, they would be discontinued should the peer mediation program coordinators or principals involved move on or retire. No discrepant information or negative cases were identified. All information derived from the interviews was incorporated into the results.

In general, all respondents were very optimistic about their experiences running the program and about the impact of the programs on both the peer mediators and the disputants who had used the programs. All interviewed individuals deemed the programs to be transformational to both them and the young people who took part in them. All respondents believed that these programs acted to engage the ideas of everyone involved in a way whereby all parties were raised to higher levels of motivation and acted together to create a common purpose. The results of this study presented some interesting findings that were not expected. Specifically, there was an indication from most respondents that most parents were either not aware of the programs or, conversely, that parents were, in fact, barriers to the program's effectiveness. Another key detail was that there was minimal mention of the program's impact on recipients of peer mediation versus the impact on the mediators themselves. It seemed that the focus of the discussions was often on how the mediators were faring, how their maturity increased, and how confident they felt rather than on how students in crisis were engaged or assisted by the program.

Themes 1 and 2: Time and Support

Time- and support-related issues would likely be findings in this research because, for the most part, education sector employees have multiple levels of

commitment within their schools, which create difficulties in meeting the needs of all students. Although this may be given, exploring this as an idiographic theme is essential. For many reasons, time is a factor in the success of peer mediation efforts. It was brought up consistently as the foremost challenge in ensuring program success. The two most salient time-related issues were the fact that training of the peer mediators needed to be allotted more time. In addition, the mediation itself was not a one-time-only event. Additional visits were necessary for the changes negotiated in sessions to take effect. As one respondent noted, a case resolved positively the first time often necessitates several follow-up visits for the mediation to make an impact. P2 posited:

> You can go a little deeper the second time or the third time or sometimes you have one disputant coming back with other individuals with the same problem so then those issues are addressed in a different manner after the mediation.

This means that the efficacy of the programs may have been affected by time-related concerns. Although most respondents were generally happy with the results of their programs, almost all of them noted that they and their peer counselors would be even more effective and would be able to reach more youths in conflict if they were able to increase the time that was spent on the program. P3 said, “It’s always about time. We always need more time.”

The theme of support was almost always attendant to that of time. This is linked to the fact that many of the respondents were likely unable to engage the number of staff they wanted to and, as a result, were overburdened from a time perspective. Because of the inordinate demand on the programs to not only develop and manage student peer

mediators but also raise awareness about the program in the school and, in many cases, in the community as well, there is a strong need for the program coordinators for peer mediation to receive administrative and physical support. This could include access to existing administrative workers in the school, administrative workers specific to their own office and physical space, and additional program coordinators or trainers. The program coordinators for peer mediation did not indicate that they did not feel their senior administration's or fellow educators' support, only that they wanted to see that the programs extended to reach more students and community members. Without adequate administrative or district-level support, program coordinators for peer mediation were not able to meet the needs of all individuals who were requesting their services.

Theme 3 and 4: Empowerment and Life Skills

In addition to the themes of time and support, empowerment and life skills were relevant. Two distinct kinds of empowerment came up in discussions: the empowerment of peer mediators to make a difference in their communities and demonstrate leadership, and the empowerment of individual students (assisted by peer mediators) to create the means to address their issues and conflicts without exacerbating the situation. According to P5:

> Students (disputants) themselves become mediators. Their growth and maturity and their ability to handle the situations that even some adults would find difficult. That students can really help other students, that peers can really have an effect on other students and be able to solve the problem.

Similarly, according to P4, "They (peer mediators) become leaders to these kids (disputants) and they set the tone. Disputants also become leaders." For the coordinators of the PM programs, the above is the most valuable aspect of their programs. The theme of empowerment was overarching: No matter what issues were evident within the schools, when students were given the tools and support to create their means of addressing issues, they excelled at doing so. Youths who are allowed to become part of the solution often end up being able to lead in a way that they had yet to envision prior to participating in the program.

The feelings and interests of the program coordinators are intrinsically linked to the idea of empowerment. Without their ability to transition power and authority away from themselves and to the peer mediators, this opportunity would not exist. Their intercession drives home the message that learning occurs through handing over power to young people; given the responsibility, these youth rise to the occasion. Participant 3 stated:

> I love it. I enjoy it very much. Because I like when students get it, when they really get it there's some joy in that. A lot of my students have gotten it and they know what the expectation is and the challenge is to honor their purpose.

In essence, a theme that emerged from the responses is the importance of the program coordinators to have the idea of empowerment as a key element of their practice. Participant 4 asserted:

> The empowerment of students, students helping other students, leadership skills, life skills, the skills that these kids will take with them and need on a day to day

> basis whether they're students or siblings, children or workers; whatever the world offers them.

Similarly, according to Participant 2:

> Hearing my peer mediators how they turnkey their skills at home with their parents and their siblings. This is a skill that is not a selfish skill and it's a lifetime skill. They apply not only in school but outside.

Many of the program coordinators for peer mediation perceived empowerment and life skills as similar in application and value; some saw the terms as interchangeable. The inherent idea being communicated, however, is that through the student's work, they can acquire specific skills and knowledge that they can apply in life and in their future careers.

In addition to pure conflict and negotiation skills, learned skills noted included active listening, paraphrasing and restating, identification of conflict issues, technical formulations of agreements that make both parties feel like they won, understanding bias and confidentiality, determining where outside intervention is necessary, family management skills, communication, and leadership. In general, it was communicated that the respondents had difficulty understanding why life skills were not considered valuable or even critical to students' educational curriculum as more standard, traditional subjects. This belief is strongly tied to the perception of social changes in the program coordinators' communities and the need to address social conflict so that students can concentrate on core subjects.

Theme 5: Social Change

There was an intrinsic connection made within responses between school-based actions and more macro-level change or potential change within the community. Most respondents saw this type of programming as an opportunity to engage students in drawing connections between their roles and social shifts. Because students could see the impact of their own actions within the school, they could also imagine how mediation might be effective in their community, their nation, and their world as a whole. Specific to social change has been the individual actions and roles of the program coordinators for peer mediation themselves. For instance, participant 4 asserted:

> Because of my success with this program over the last 20 years, I've been in contact with other programs as far away as the Canary Islands, Switzerland, the Middle East, and they've had an interest in the model and how it's set up. Cyprus was interested. United Nations had an interest. Just this September this program was asked to represent the United States at a UN Peace Conference. It was webcasted to Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Greece.

There is a feeling that if the programs could be extended into different social contexts—not simply schools but to political, organizational, and community sectors—there might be potential changes in how individuals approached conflict overall. Participant 1 said, "Kids walk away thinking that they have solved their own problems and that now they can deal with whatever might result after that."

Participant 5 said, "children who learn the skills have much more successful lives, have friends, able to handle issues with parents/friends in a fair way. To learn that you

can have different opinions and respect that there are differences and that's ok." There is an important educational message that each of the respondents wanted to get across that was attached to this effort. As educators, all respondents held it to be their responsibility to pass on the skills that students need to address conflict in their lifetimes. This is one of the most important reasons why they believed peer mediation programs needed to be extended to all school and community students. The program coordinators wish that through their passion for peer mediation, they might communicate how broader social goals might be achieved, such as decreasing crime, violent conflict, and war. If students begin to learn and use these tools at a young age, there would be a greater potential for changes in the way that our society operates. Bandura (1994) asserted that positive role modeling is always a good approach to steer students in the right way.

Theme 6: Lack of Parental Engagement

Part of the reason that the role of the program coordinators for peer mediation is so important is the fact that there are deep concerns about parental engagement evident in respondent discussions. Although most respondents were fairly certain that parents supported their efforts, almost all had stories to tell about the challenges they had faced, as both program coordinators and educational administrators, with parents who were unwilling or unable to manage their children's personal and social difficulties. At the same time, some of the program coordinators made concerted efforts to bypass the challenges with parents by facing the problem head-on. Participant 1 noted that they took it upon themselves to run a Saturday conflict and mediation program where parents could participate. P1 said:

> I have offered many times to take a day and that sort of thing to run programs for parents. It was successful when we did it. We didn't have a lot of parents who came, but the parents who did come sat around a table kind of like this, it was informal. I think the parents felt they were gaining something positive, learning how to deal with their children.
>
> Crucially, parents can be supportive if they know about the program. P3 posited:
>
> I don't know how many parents know or what they know so I can't give you a good number. Although, in most cases, if there's a fight, we call the parents and let them know that we're trying to mediate and negotiate with them so this way no one gets suspended or arrested. The parents are usually pretty good that way, they're supportive. The parents who have been involved so far are very supportive.

By extending the educational offerings outside of the classroom and in concert with parents, program coordinators felt that they could solidify the means by which students would learn and apply their mediation skills in their family and social lives. Additionally, one of the most significant communicated with respondents was the need for parents to have a realistic view of what their children were doing and saying at school. Many of the program coordinators for peer mediation expressed concern that parents were less aware of their children's actions and interests than they would have liked. Although efforts were made to engage parents in the mediation process, this was not always possible. For this reason, the role of the program coordinators for peer mediation becomes more significant than that of parents in applying conflict mediation skills. P2 asserted:

> Many parents are not aware of the service because it's a confidential service, but if a child has had a problem with a verbal, hostile disagreement with another student and then it is brought to the parent's attention and then they are always recommend that the child be sent to mediation. We have had parents who have sat outside of the view of their child to get a better understanding of how their child behaves in school rather than at home because some kids have the ability to fool their parents.

Theme 7: Training

As noted in the previous section, leadership is a key overarching philosophical point of discussion. To ensure that the students receive adequate training and support, the program coordinators must also continue to upgrade their skills. Most of the program coordinators for peer mediation placed a significant amount of value on their training, although various backgrounds were represented, as noted above. Most importantly, through their participation in the program, many disputants have moved forward to become peer mediators themselves and, in this way, great leaders. According to participant 2:

> The experience of youth themselves have had become one of the best recruiting tools for the mediation program. A lot of the children, the students that have gone through the process become so interested in how the process worked for them that they also want to become mediators, peer mediators to help other students gain that skill and reduce conflict.

This perception is likely linked to the value of transformational leadership because respondents had such a positive point of view on their ability to act as transformational leaders and provide the same experience for the youth they trained in peer mediation.

A transformational leader engages the ideas of everyone involved so that both parties are raised to higher levels of motivation and together create a common purpose (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). The method by which this occurs, according to Northouse (2009), is through the integration of inspiration and the solicitation of new ideas. These particular peer mediation program coordinators can make a transformational impact on students and push forward the concept of shared leadership because peer mediation is to solicit student ideas rather than simply having professional educators or counselors take the lead. In this way, peer mediation program coordinators act to build connections between the members of their student teams and disputants so that they can work together more effectively toward an end goal that they can conceive together.

If there is a sense of justice within the values present in transformational leadership, it is linked to an underlying sense of morality (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). This is linked to what the peer mediation program coordinators have identified as integrity, on their part and that of students, in taking a leadership role in the process. The peer mediation program coordinators need to create an educational community where problems are addressed positively, impacting the whole school in terms of reducing conflict. The methodology of the peer mediation program coordinators is not focused on what they are personally going to get out of the situation through their leadership or how they can impose a normative structure of social controls but instead on what they can

bring to the educational experience for both their students and for the whole school. For these peer mediation program coordinators, authentic leadership is a moral undertaking and a response to human needs as expressed in human values.

Theme 8: Necessity of Government Involvement

The final overarching idiographic theme was government involvement and engagement in applying peer mediation initiatives. Because the program coordinators for peer mediation felt so strongly about utilizing this type of programming in schools, for the most part, they believed that there was a need for codification of conflict resolution tenets within the curriculum. While one of the respondents noted a need for a national agenda on conflict management in communities and schools, most pointed to the school district or state as the means to employ peer mediation programming on a broader basis. Some concerns connected to government engagement were directly related to funding. Participant 2 asserted:

> I think that [this type of program] needs to have the full support of the administration and the government because there are a lot of resources that are needed for the program that we really don't see being put into the program, in terms of maintaining new curriculum materials, handouts, we have to develop them ourselves, and there's so much material out there that we need funds to purchase them.

The participant further stated, "There's no more training of new staff members across the city, you don't hear any talk about it anymore in the city state budget. You don't really see funds coming in from the local authority." Similarly, participant 1 asserted:

> My major concern is that they haven't continued with the training. We used to have a lot of training, both for the teachers as well as for the students. We used to meet with other peer mediation and conflict resolution teachers once a month or so and we could talk about new ideas, we were given new materials. That has not happened in a very long time. Our students used to go for training sessions also, and that has not happened in a very long time. We used to have Saturday sessions.

Many program coordinators for peer mediation may go out of their way to either purchase materials out of their own pockets or create them on their own time fair manner. Their abilities are now a tremendous asset in the community. It is essential to find ways to keep funding peer mediation programs.

Summary

Overall, programs like those reviewed in this research benefit from positive attitudes and passion of educational leaders in charge of PM. Schools will not, however, be able to capture that passion without ensuring these programs can continue. The only way to do so is to engage additional education professionals in taking on leadership roles involving peer mediation and conflict resolution and extend the reach of programs to a larger cadre of students. By engaging more teachers and extending programs, this type of programming will likely spark additional pedagogical interest within classrooms and among administrators. In addition, when existing program coordinators are given the support they need, they will likely become even more committed coordinators. Chapter 5 includes conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The present study's focus was to explore managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences about their roles in PM programs. The study involved structured interviews with five respondents. Results of this study indicated time and support were needed for creating useful mentoring programs. Lack of time was consistently described as the foremost challenge mitigating ensuring program success. More time needed to be allotted for training of peer mediators. Empowerment was a concept participants discussed. Empowerment was discussed in terms of peer mediators making a difference in their communities and demonstrating leadership. Empowerment was linked to individual students (assisted by peer mediators) in terms of creating the means to address their issues and conflicts without exacerbating the problem that initiated the need for mediation. Participants in this study perceived peer mentoring as an opportunity to effect social change. Most participants saw this type of programming as an opportunity to engage students in terms of drawing connections between their roles and social shifts. Given that students could see the impact of their own actions within the school, they could also imagine how mediation might be effective in their community and society. While the benefits of PM include empowerment and social change, results also revealed some challenges. One of the challenges related to lack of parental involvement in terms of managing their children's personal and social difficulties, and another challenge related to the need for more school and government involvement and engagement in terms of applying PM initiatives. This chapter includes interpretations of the findings,

limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications for positive social change, and a conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

Experiences related to PM were empowering and transformational, leading to new ideas regarding what leadership meant for educators and students. According to Lantieri and Patti (1996), student mediators are essential to PM, where they are taught negotiation procedures. Some adults, including faculty members in school, are skeptical about the prospect of students resolving conflicts without involvement of adults (O'Farrell, 2010; Smith, 1999). Moreover, according to Sellman (2011), conflict resolution and civic engagement are often taught to students as knowledge they will use in adulthood instead of tools to be leveraged in terms of enhancing positive engagement in the present.

Johnson and Johnson (1996) posited there is a need to distinguish between conflicts that student mediators can handle and those that require an adult. Student mediators can handle gossiping, borrowing things, and not returning them or returning them in worse conditions, bullying others or being bullied, relationship issues, and fighting (Brummans et al., 2021; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). According to Daunic and Smith (2010), in more complex situations, particularly those involving conflicts between students and teachers, peer mediators would need to be paired with adult mediators to offer guidance. Furthermore, according to Michalopoulou et al. (2022), peer-mediated interventions involving student peers are highly useful in terms of helping students with special needs who might be prone to antisocial conduct. According to Shulman (1996), schools might benefit from PM in the form of reduced school violence on account of

effective conflict resolution; however, primary beneficiaries of the programs are student peer mediators. They develop positive problem-solving skills, better communication skills, and improved self-image (O'Farrell, 2010; Stomfy-Stitz, 1994).

According to Shahmohammadi (2014), PM makes it possible to socialize students in terms of competencies and perspectives they need to resolve conflicts at school effectively as well as for the rest of their lives. According to Ay et al. (2019), implementation of PM programs for resolving conflicts among students resulted in a noticeable improvement in terms of the tendency of students to favor collaborative practices involving decision-making and resolving conflicts, as opposed to being overly domineering or avoiding conflicts.

In general, problems were addressed through the PM program. These included typical relationship and conflict-related issues as well as related linked to family, some involving racism. Participants of this study indicated that most problems that were brought to their attention in their schools were successfully addressed and solved. However, participants were also concerned that many students in need of assistance could not access the program, either because they were unaware of the benefits or there were not enough ways to find PM resources in their schools. Terry (1997) determined that when queried on their likelihood of seeking peer mediators to resolve their conflicts, the majority of students registered their apprehension. Moreover, according to Sainz and Martin-Moya (2023), there is a lack of clear guidelines involving resolution of more complex and violent conduct such as bullying, which results in PM being underused

mainly when resolving such conflicts. However, overall, there appears to be a willingness among students to leverage PM to resolve their conflicts.

A suitable approach for combating the challenge would be to leverage student peer mediators. According to Terry (1997), of the students who have used peer mediation to help solve an interpersonal conflict, a high percentage believed that the service was useful. About half responded that they would opt to use the service in the future and would be likely to recommend it to a friend. García-Raga et al. (2017) asserted that there is a clear overwhelming positive perception of PM as a suitable and beneficial approach for helping them resolve their conflicts effectively.

The peer mediation program coordinators' concerns were strongly connected to training and consistency within the student population and with their colleagues. Nickerson and Spears (2007) asserted that without sufficient training to address the teachers' behaviors, there is a danger that the adults' words will not match their actions. Similarly, according to Hojbota et al. (2014), effective training of the peer mediation program coordinators, as well as the peer mediators, is integral to the success of PM programs, especially since, in the present context, most programs fail to match the expected outcomes owing to the limited uptake of the relevant training needed by the coordinators and peer mediators. All five respondents felt that they were the source of engagement in the peer mediation program and that the program depended on their abilities.

Training must be extended at the administrative and peer educator levels. Without adequate training, students become too dependent on their own opinions to help mediate

rather than on skills that will help their peers (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Without developing a knowledge base within the broader teacher community at their schools, peer mediation program coordinators felt that students would not have the correct information about the resources the program could provide. It was an important goal for most respondents that the ideas inherent in their programs were extended as far as possible throughout the student population and within the education community. This was linked to their personal beliefs in the values associated with the program and the potential impact on the student body. Burrell et al. (2003) and Cardoza (2013) determined a strong positive correlation between the level of PM training for the facilitators and the success rate of PM initiatives. Similarly, according to Quitoriano (2022), PM trainers must recognize that training is integral to one's capacity development. However, its success is hinged on translating the training into practice. The peer mediation program coordinators believed this programming was necessary for every educational facility. Also, the importance of enhancing the success of PM programs was to leverage clear procedures for addressing more complex conflicts such as bullying. Gaffney et al. (2021) proposed a five-step process for addressing bullying in which the second-last step entails PM involving the bullies and the victims. The initial stages include the identification of incidences of bullying and those involved, including the bullies and their victims, as well as providing support to the victims. It is after the effective execution of those stages that PM is undertaken, with the initial stages providing a good basis for the success of the PM initiatives in addressing bullying incidents.

One of the most interesting concepts the peer mediation program coordinators discussed was potentiality and its role in making students leaders. As noted, everyone has an opportunity to reach their potential at some point in the future (Schellenberg & Parks-Savage, 2007). It is up to those within a leadership position to create the possibility to help people along their path.

For the development of the student mediators, Finn et al. (2021) presented a suitable model involving the framing of individual capacity as a blend of technical capabilities, intra-personal elements such as motivation and confidence, and interpersonal capacities, including leadership and management. By prioritizing the three-pronged approach to capacity development, it can enhance the students' leadership capabilities. One has both opportunities to follow and lead. Both are important aspects of the human experience.

The role of both the peer mediation program coordinators and the peers themselves allowed conflicts to be addressed (Kacmaz, 2011). However, the process involved required leadership in being a collaborative effort. This reflects the idea of leadership put forward by Collins (2001). Collins (2001) noted that "everyone would like to be the best, but most organizations lack the discipline to figure out with egoless clarity what they can be the best at and the will to do whatever it takes to turn potential into reality" (p. 128). Connecting leadership with those within the organization's ranks, rather than only at the top, allows organizations to help individuals create the confidence to make choices that benefit everyone in the long term. It is about recognizing the potential within every person, allowing the peer mediation program coordinators to reach the goals

of bringing leadership to the ranks (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2006). This is because they understand that the school cannot achieve its goals through its ideas alone. Achieving those goals requires the commitment of students as well.

The implication of the transformational effect of leadership, specifically on disputants, is linked to a psychodynamic process inherent in learning how to lead. Mediation managers' thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences are strongly tied to this process. Interestingly, Northouse (2009) noted that the psychodynamic approach to leadership finds its roots in the family. Because people learn how they relate to each other at a very young age, how a person acts within the family is often very representative of how they approach leadership. The psychodynamic approach suggests that individuals have a tough time changing how they operate over time because relationship rituals are very ingrained (Northouse, 2009). One might assume, therefore, that these students are successful in their peer counseling endeavors because they have learned how to lead effectively through the program itself. At a very young age, connecting young people with leadership efforts and positive role modeling (Bandura, 1997) may impact their future abilities. A similar view is held by Ibarrola-Garcia and Redin (2013), who posited that there exist significant benefits to students who get involved in PM as mediators, with one of the most prominent ones being the ability to perceive conflicts as an integral part of human interactions that need to be handled effectively to enhance the life outcomes of all participants. Such an understanding proves vital for their future undertakings as leaders owing to their positive outlook on conflicts and different ways of handling them effectively.

School counseling is favorably positioned to help build more effective educational environments, but the resources are only sometimes present. Mediation program managers believe they have a role in inviting support for their work and their students through administrative channels. With growing challenges in realizing student success within changing social and cultural norms, schools need to take advantage of the educational support that peers mediation managers can provide. As Galassi and Akos (2004) noted, "contemporary education is challenged by what has been referred to as the 'new morbidities' — poor nutrition, unsafe sex, drugs, teenage pregnancy, and parenting, lack of job skills, inadequate access to health care, and homelessness" (p. 154). This means that educators face a difficult environment to impart knowledge from both a social and an academic perspective.

Student needs and the expected roles of counselors are, in addition, becoming more diverse, which affects the success of the programs. Counselors are not necessarily able to react as quickly as necessary to changes in cultural contexts in their communities and the social expectations of parents. Interestingly, in an early assessment of the counselor's role, Katz (1963) noted that considering values and resolving value conflicts is the essence of guidance at the high school level. Although this tenet of the guidance counselor's mission has not changed, the expectations of parents and school administrators have changed. Individual counselors may be unable to focus on a broader role that incorporates social goals because assumed outcomes are tied to external factors, such as college and university admission statistics.

In addition, existing counselor roles need to be clarified, which also affects the success of peer mediation programs. As Galassi and Akos (2004) reported, "the National Standards fail to provide the school counselor with an effective implementation plan and fail to connect counseling functions directly to proposed outcomes" (p. 149). This means that while they may be academically prepared for their role, many counselors cannot get the support they need to make the impact they were trained to have within the school. Galassi and Akos (2004) illustrated the need for sound, widely accepted principles and roles for school counselors, and Borders (2002) called for comprehensive, developmental, and systemic values within the profession. However, Borders (2002) and Galassi and Akos (2004) noted that the system does not seem to support implementing such a strategic social construct for counselors and counseling success. This means that both the literature and the respondents perceive a clear need for peer mediation programs that take advantage of the leadership potential of young people.

Limitations of the Study

Though the study achieved what it set out to do, which was to explore the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and experiences of the program managers who ran peer mediation programs, the fact remains that the sample was small. As a result, the small sample challenges the study's trustworthiness and is one of the aspects of the study that would be addressed in future research. I had set out to recruit two school personnel per school within the five boroughs of New York City. It turned out that only four schools were able to participate and qualified, and only five of the potential 15 participants met the requirements to participate in the study. It took a lot of work to find schools with

existing peer mediation programs and even harder to find schools with a peer mediation program established for at least five years. As a result, only four schools were able to participate.

In addition, I encountered many difficulties finding school personnel who met the study's criteria. Only one school had two school personnel that met the criteria in the study, and the other three schools either did not meet the criteria or only had one school personnel running the PM program. Interestingly, PM is a well-known program and is thought to exist in many schools, but contrary to belief, it is less popular. It was also found that schools that needed a PM program still needed it. Some of the reasons attached to this explanation were that it was not a mandated program, the school district did not have the funding to institute such a program, nor the physical space and staff to run it.

The participants' passion, commitment, and voices resonated clearly despite the small sample. Their responses reflected their frustration with the limitations of the PM programs, their love for the programs, and their desire to make the program a success. As noted by Galassi and Akos (2004), there is a clear limitation in the literature and within the profession and its efficacy with respect to assisting students faced with conflict and other social issues. At the same time, Galassi and Akos (2004) determined gaps within the profession itself, noting that many high school counselors lack a fundamental ability in childhood and adolescent development principles. This means that, within this context, students seeking help are less likely to turn to their counselors for assistance. The need to institute a peer mediation program in every school seems apparent based on this study, but it is not being done, and less so in the schools that face the challenge of bullying and

other types of violence. Consequently, the five participants highlighted some key factors that are important to running a useful peer mediation program.

Recommendations

Based on these findings and the literature review, several specific recommendations should be utilized in evaluating the application of conflict resolution and peer mediation initiatives within the school system.

1. Measure the specific effects of peer mediation initiatives and program coordinators for peer mediation on the district level. Although many studies have demonstrated the ability of conflict resolution and peer mediation initiatives, it is clear that without a district-level standard, there will be no opportunity to extend the reach of these programs. As noted above, these programs are considered so positive and valuable that program coordinators recommended that these programs be implemented within the education system to be successful over the long term. For this to happen, expected outcomes, standards of care, contingency plans, and risk management strategies must be created by thoroughly examining existing protocols and their impact on the school level.
2. Create a government standard and programmatic objective for peer mediation and leadership initiatives. The reason for this recommendation is linked to the program coordinators' three major concerns for peer mediation: time, support, and government involvement. These three concerns are related from the point of view of funding. With a government mandate, programs such as the ones managed by the program coordinators for peer mediation would need more financial resources to be

maintained; they are guaranteed to continue once the program coordinators for peer mediation have retired. Government standards do not have to be created at the national level. Even with a mandate at the district level, the capacity of programs such as those described in this research and their longevity can be maintained. Over the long term, however, it is clear that the value of these types of programs should be extended. As noted above, training must be extended at the administrative and peer educator levels. Without adequate training, students become too dependent on their own opinions to help mediate rather than on skills that will help their peers. With government standards in place for training, program coordinators will be able to get the time and resources they need to ensure that all students have the same level of support.

3. Develop conflict resolution as an educational mandate within the university's teacher and administrator training programs. As Hallinger (2003) noted, one of the biggest challenges the education system in the United States currently faces is administrative succession. With demographic changes necessitating an overhaul of the educational leadership in the country, there is a need to recognize that consistency is a factor. As Stewart (2006) reported, collectively, educational administration programs are the weakest of all the programs at the nation's education schools. This is particularly distressing considering the change in demographics and the fact that many school leaders will need to be hired in the next ten years. It seems reasonable to conclude that the training and preparation of school leaders will need to be addressed if we expect to have the kind of leaders who can address the profound shifts in society and

the complications and challenges these pose for educational systems (p. 94). In other words, individuals with broad educational backgrounds and administrative leadership training, such as the ones interviewed for this study, are becoming rare. Without shifts in the educational training system, programs like peer mediation will continue to rely on individuals' professional and personal interests, which is no guarantee. For valuable programs to be maintained, university-level educational systems planners must be dedicated to teaching mediation and conflict resolution to all individuals who are or will be responsible for leadership within a school.

4. Engage the community and parents in programs. Although it is unlikely to get funding for a program extension into the community in the near future, it is clear that the program coordinators for peer mediation placed a high value on family-based services and learning initiatives. There is a growing need for engaging students' families in educational development, and family programming can provide the backbone for engagement that will provide the student's balance and support. The complexity of the modern learning environment, which places heavy demands on the school, makes family-based programming all the more appealing. Engaging families in conflict resolution programming is also aligned with creating a shared sense of meaning between a parent and a child, which can add to psychological development and help the student acquire social structural knowledge in the long term.

Implications

The study's outcomes featured key implications for the field of PM. The positive social change implications for this study will allow for the voices of PM program

coordinators, which in turn will provide insight and future study implications for peer mentoring leadership. By having a better understanding of the experience of PM coordinators, this study can bring about positive social change for both the PM coordinators and adolescents who act as peer mentors. Crucially, the perception of the PM programs by program coordinators and their attitudes toward the programs seemed to have a significant effect on the success of the programs (Burrell et al., 2003). The program coordinators interviewed maintained a positive attitude and attempted, in most instances, to transfer that attitude to the peer mediators, thus improving the overall tone of the program. It is likely that the peer mediators did a better job due to the positive feedback and mentoring they received from the program coordinators for peer mediation. If their attitude were negative, probably, the program would not have been as successful, and the peer mediators would not have been perceived as having done a tremendous service to their communities (Waldon-Johnson, 2015). In this way, program coordinators for peer mediation act as transformational leaders. Responses indicated that the program coordinators for peer mediation thought these were necessary programs for the school, its students and teachers, and the community in general. The program coordinators for peer mediation believed that there was a need for the community to be further integrated into the program in the long term.

Therefore, it is recommended four things happening to build upon the work of program coordinators for peer mediation and extend the opportunity for positive social change. First, school boards must measure the specific effects of peer mediation initiatives and program coordinators at the district level (Theberge & Karan, 2004).

Second, boards must create a government standard and programmatic objective for peer mediation and leadership initiatives. Third, university leaders must develop conflict resolution as an educational mandate within teacher training and administrator training programs at the university level (Burrell et al., 2003). Fourth, schools must work toward engaging the community and parents in conflict resolution and peer mediation programs.

Conclusion

The support of the program coordinators for peer mediation and their belief in the contributions of young people is indicative of and necessary for the program's success. It was an important goal for most respondents that the ideas inherent in their programs were extended as far as possible throughout the student population and within the education community. This was linked to their personal beliefs in the values associated with the program and its potential impact on the student body. The peer mediation program coordinators believed this program was necessary for every educational facility. At the same time, they felt that although they thought they had enough support to do the work, they neither had the time nor the resources to do everything they wanted. Without adequate administrative, governmental, or district-level support, program coordinators for peer mediation were not able to meet the needs of all individuals who were requesting their services. It was a real privilege for me to have had the chance to interview these participants and learn about their unique experiences. The phenomenological approach allowed me to focus on the participants' subjective experiences and recount their personal experiences. It was a true phenomenon. These participants genuinely cared for the PM program that they ran. They all expressed concerns for the future of the program,

uncertain who would lead it and what would happen to it when they retired or if they were to relinquish their roles.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Demographic:

Age _____ Male ____ or Female ____

Highest degree completed: Bachelor_____ Master_____ PhD _____

Major field of teaching: _____

1. How did you become interested in the area of peer mediation?
2. What relevant training have you had in mediation?
3. What have been your experiences in running a peer mediation program?
4. How do you like working with students in peer mediation?
5. How do you feel about the decisions made by your peer mediators on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the highest? Explain.
6. Do you feel that the peers doing the mediating see this as an important function?
7. Do the students who come before the group find the mediation sessions valuable?
8. List five of the most typical cases or issues that come before the group
9. What percentages of cases that come before you are resolved with a positive outcome?

10. How do you monitor the success and or failure of those cases?

11. Are there any follow-up with the students who come for peer mediation?

12. List the different ways your administration has shown support for the peer mediation program?

13. How do you think the students in your school feel about the peer mediation program on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the highest?

14. How do you think parents of your students feel about the peer mediation program on a scale of 1–5, with 5 being the highest?

15. What gives you the greatest satisfaction in the peer mediation program?

16. What do you see as weaknesses in the peer mediation program?

17. What changes do you feel would increase the effectiveness of your peer mediation program?

18. What do you see as the strengths in the peer mediation program?

19. What concerns do you have in regard to the program?

20. What do you perceive as your most important contribution to the PM program?

21. What would happen if you should relinquish your role in the peer mediation program?

22. Can you share some of your negative/positive experiences in regard to your peer mediation program? For example, hostile parents, legal suit, or participants of peer mediation becoming peer mediators.

23. Has this program affected other areas of your professional and personal life? How?

24. What is your overall feeling and evaluation of the PM program for the school, students, teachers, and community?