

2015

# Impact of an Urban High School Conflict Resolution Program on Peer Mediators:

Carolyn Joyce Waldon-Johnson  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Carolyn Waldon

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2015

Abstract

Impact of an Urban High School Conflict Resolution Program on Peer Mediators:

A Single Case Study

by

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MA, Prairie View A&M University, 2005

BS, Prairie View A&M University, 1985

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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December, 2015

## Abstract

Urban high school students in the United States are often involved in conflicts related to bullying, physical fighting, and drug abuse. These conflicts create a hostile learning environment; interventions such as conflict resolution programs are implemented to reduce these disruptions to learning. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacts trained peer mediators. The conceptual framework was based on Erikson's psychosocial theory of human development and Freire's critical theory about pedagogy of the oppressed.

Participants included 4 high school students who participated as trained peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program in a southern state. Data were collected from multiple sources, including individual interviews with students, reflective journals maintained by these students, and archival records and documents related to this program. At the first level of data analysis, line-by-line initial coding and categorization was used to analyze each data source. A content analysis was used for archival records and documents. At the second level, categorized data across all sources of data was examined to determine themes and discrepant data. The key finding was that this conflict resolution program positively impacted peer mediators because they learned cultural competency skills such as active listening and maintaining neutrality; these skills helped participants fulfill their desire to help peers resolve conflicts and to resolve personal altercations with friends and family. This study will help educators and policymakers develop a deeper understanding about how conflict resolution programs and peer mediators improve the learning environment in urban high schools.

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## Dedication

I want to give honor to God from whom all blessings flow. God was my strength in enduring many hardships during this dissertation process. I also want to thank my family for being understanding when I missed family vacations, family gatherings and other functions, but they still remained supportive of me. For their support, I am truly thankful. As I carry the torch to implement positive social change in education, I leave behind the light for my grandchildren to follow.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Conflict is a natural part of life, and conflict in public schools in the United States often reflects the violence that occurs in society. Conflict frequently occurs in urban public schools and their communities as a result of an increase in gangs, drug use, and bullying. In 2007, an estimated 1.5 million students between the ages of 12-18 were victims of nonfatal crimes at school involving both theft and violence (Hong & Eamon, 2012). In 2010, the Center for Disease Control reported more than 738,000 young people ages 10 to 24 were treated in emergency departments for injuries related to assault; over 30% of high school students reported being in at least one physical fight; and nearly 20% reported being bullied on school property. In addition, homicides and assault-related injuries among youth ages 10 to 24 in one year cost Americans an estimated \$16.2 billion in lifetime combined medical and work loss costs.

In order to address this escalating violence in urban public schools, many educators across the United States have implemented conflict resolution programs; these programs are often funded through federal Safe and Drug Free Schools grants. Some prior research has been conducted on these programs. In a study of conflict resolution at the middle school level, Roberts, Yeoman, and Ferro (2007) found that a positive school climate develops when students are trained in conflict resolution skills. In another study about reducing violence in elementary schools, Cantrell (2007) found that participation in school mediation programs equip student mediators with negotiation skills and techniques in conflict resolution. This research indicates that students who are trained as

peer mediators in these conflict resolution programs play a critical role in helping other students to resolve conflict. Therefore, this dissertation study was designed to address the limited prior qualitative research on conflict resolution programs in urban public schools in the United States, particularly in relation to the impact these programs have on peer mediators.

This study was designed to promote positive social change in education in a number of ways. The findings are intended to assist educators and researchers in developing a deeper understanding about how conflict resolution programs impact peer mediators, particularly in relation to the role peer mediators play in resolving student conflicts. This understanding will help educators and researchers to design and implement more effective conflict resolution programs, particularly in urban high schools. This study also provides school counselors and other educators with recommendations about how to develop more effective early intervention programs for resolving student conflict, particularly in large urban high schools.

This chapter is an introduction to this study and includes information about the background to this study, which involves a brief summary of the research literature and the gaps in research related to conflict resolution programs and the role of peer mediators in those programs. In addition, this chapter includes the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the conceptual framework, which is based on the theories of Erikson and Freire. This chapter also includes a brief summary of the methodology that will be used for this study, as well as the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

## Background

Conflict has been present in civilization since the beginning of recorded human history and literature. Conflict first appeared in the Bible when Adam and Eve defied the will of God by eating the forbidden fruit (Lefkovitz, 2011). In another story of Biblical conflict, Jacob and Esau became rivals, even in their mother's womb (Schinder, 2007). Israelites also faced conflict in Egypt, and as a result, Moses led them through the desert for 40 years on their way to the promised land (Anderson, 2012). Joseph faced conflict in his own family when his jealous brothers sold him into slavery (Dershowitz, (2000). These early conflicts in the Bible indicate that conflict has always been a part of human history.

The clergy of the early Christian Church also assumed an active role in resolving conflict through the use of mediation. In *The Mediation Process*, Moore (2003) noted that church members often considered clergy as mediators. Moore pointed out that the Catholic church in western Europe during the Middle Ages was viewed as the central institution where clergy mediated family disputes, criminal disputes, and diplomatic disputes.

Human perspectives on conflict are often significantly different, particularly in relation to local culture. Chew (2001) maintained that culture shapes the ways in which parties understand conflict, process it, and develop solutions. Avruch and Black (1998) found that culture is often associated with group differences, and therefore, conflict may be intercultural. Wing (2009) found that referrals to mediation are often based on race, and mediation results indicate that the dominant culture often prevails. Bonta (1996)



found that peaceful cultures often share fundamental worldviews where some level of conflict and violence is accepted. These findings suggest that culture is driven by behavior, how other individuals are perceived, and how behavior is understood. A significant number of studies have been conducted on the development and implementation of conflict resolution programs in public schools in the United States. These studies addressed a wide range of topics related to conflict resolution, including student bullying, classroom behavior, and a related culture of community violence. In a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies about school bullying, Ttofi, Farrington, Losel, and Loeber (2011) found that school bullying is a risk factor for late offending and that anti-bullying programs create safer schools. In a study about teaching conflict resolution skills to middle and high school students through interactive drama and role play, Graves, Frabutt, and Vigliano (2007) found that these types of activities encouraged students to consider other nonviolent alternatives. In a study about the evaluation of a specific multimedia conflict resolution curriculum, Goldsworthy, Schwartz, Barab, and Landa (2006) examined the STAR (Stop, Think, Act and Reflect) curriculum for reducing conflict among youth and found that students were able to identify strategies for reducing and solving conflicts as a result of their participation in this curriculum. Hunter (2008) evaluated a teacher's peaceable classroom curriculum and found that it fostered social justice and peacemaking and improved the emotional and social growth of students. These findings suggest that conflict resolution programs are effective in reducing student violence and maintaining safe schools.

The role of peer mediators in conflict resolution programs has also been explored in some studies. Morgado and Oliviera (2010) determined that peer mediators help students improve their social skills, self-esteem, and empathy for others. In a study about the characteristics of a successful implementation of peer mediation services in relation to conflict resolution in public schools, Sellman (2011) found that a peer mediation program must be compatible with the school's vision for student empowerment. Wing (2009) explored the relationship between mediation and equality and found that mediator bias negatively impact the results of the mediation process. Wing maintained that mediators need to engage in neutral relationships with participants in order to promote fairness in the mediation process. Wing concluded that mediation often fails to meet the needs of participants by not ensuring neutrality, equality, and fairness for all parties. In a study about the perspectives of primary school peer mediators on their mediation practices, Kacmaz (2011) found that students who are trained as peer mediators demonstrate improved behavior and improved relationships with their friends. These findings suggest that trained peer mediators can reduce unfairness in the mediation process.

There is conflicting evidence involving studies from Yacco and Smith (2010), Roberts, Yeomans, and Ferro-Almeida (2007), Johnson and Johnson (2012), and Smith-Sanders and Harter (2007) about the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs implemented in the United States. In a study about understanding multiparty student conflict, Yacco and Smith (2010) found that conflict resolution programs designed to help students negotiate multiparty conflicts can make the decision making process difficult and can be overwhelming for individuals. However, Roberts, Yeomans, and

Ferro-Almeida (2007) found that violence in school was nonexistent during the implementation of Project WIN, a conflict resolution program implemented at a middle school,, and that students learned to process conflicts in cooperative ways so that both parties in conflict could win. This aligned with Johnson and Johnson's (2012) findings on restorative justice practices in the classroom and conclusion that in order for restorative justice to be effective, individuals should participate in a cooperative context, focusing on mutual goals and concern for the well-being of others. Smith-Sanders and Harter (2007) explored Students Taking Active Responsibility (STAR), a conflict resolution program implemented at a junior high school, and they found that this program helped students develop self-confidence and improved relations with other students. These findings suggest conflicting evidence concerning the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs.

Even though significant research been conducted on conflict resolution and peer mediation in public school settings, little qualitative research has been conducted on the impact of conflict resolution programs in urban high schools on peer mediators. In particular, little qualitative research has been conducted about how high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban conflict resolution program describe their role in resolving conflicts and the beliefs that they hold about the effectiveness of a conflict resolution program in helping them resolve conflicts among their peers. This study was needed because it addresses the research gap about the impact of an urban high school conflict resolution program on peer mediators. This study is also needed because it addresses , how peer mediators describe their role in resolving conflicts in these conflict

resolution programs and the beliefs that these peer mediators hold about the effectiveness of these programs in helping students resolve conflict.

### **Problem Statement**

Students who attend large urban high schools in the United States are often involved in conflicts related to bullying, physical fighting, and alcohol and drug abuse and do not possess the necessary skills to handle conflict (Safe and Drug Free Schools, 2000). These conflicts create a hostile and unsafe learning environment that stifles the academic performance of students, and therefore, interventions are often needed to prevent disruptions to learning. These interventions come in the form of conflict resolution programs that are funded through federal and/or state programs. These conflict resolution programs use trained student mediators to help their peers resolve conflicts that occur in the school setting. However, little qualitative research has been conducted on the impact of these conflict resolution programs on peer mediators who are given the responsibility of helping students resolve conflicts. This qualitative study was specifically designed to this research gap by exploring the impact of an urban high school conflict resolution programs on trained peer mediators.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this single case study was to explore how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacted trained peer mediators. In order to accomplish this purpose, I recorded how current high school students who participated as peer mediators described their role as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program. I also compared and contrasted their responses to how documents relating to the

development and implementation of a conflict resolution program presented the role of the experienced peer mediator. In addition, I described the beliefs that current high school students held about the effectiveness of a conflict resolution program.

### **Research Questions**

The primary and secondary research questions were developed according to the conceptual framework and the literature review for this study.

#### **Primary Research Question**

How does an urban high school conflict resolution program impact trained peer mediators?

#### **Secondary Research Questions**

1. How do high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program describe their role in resolving conflicts?
2. What do archival records reveal about the expected role of peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program?
3. What do high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program believe about the effectiveness of this program in helping students resolve conflicts?
4. What do archival records reveal about the effectiveness of an urban high school conflict resolution program in resolving student conflicts?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study combined Erikson's (1982) psychosocial theory of human stage development and Freire's (1968) theory concerning pedagogy of

the oppressed. These theories provided the contextual lens for this qualitative study, and therefore, a brief description of these theories and a discussion of how these theories relate to the purpose of this study are provided below.

The theories of Erickson (1950, 1982) and Freire (1968) formed the conceptual framework for this study for several reasons. Both of these educational theorists have been instrumental in how human development is viewed. Freire's ideas about societal development and Erickson's ideas about the stages of human development are important in understanding how conflict is resolved among individuals. Freire and Erikson argued that healthy relationships can only be developed once individuals are able to work through conflicts in a nonviolent way. Because the purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an urban high school conflict resolution program on peer mediators in resolving student conflicts, this conceptual framework was helpful in understanding how conflicts are often resolved.

### **Erikson's Stages of Human Development**

Considered to be a follower of Freud, Erikson (1982) developed an original theory about the stages of human development. Although Erikson accepted Freud's ideas about psychosexual stages, Erickson expanded on these stages, defining them as psychosocial stages. Erickson's theory includes the following eight stages of the human life cycle: (a) infancy, (b) early childhood, (c) play age, (d) school age, (e) adolescence, (f) young adulthood, (g) adulthood, and (h) old age. Erikson's psychosocial theory about the stages of human development has been instrumental in explaining human behavior

and in defining the specific conflict that individuals face during each stage of the life cycle.

Erikson's (1982) research was particularly important to this study because Erikson conducted considerable research about human identity. Erikson noted that adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 are faced with the daunting task of developing their own identity and forming close relationships with peers. Erikson also noted that young adults between the ages of 18 and 40 are faced with the continuing challenge of developing intimate relationships with other people. Adolescents often find it difficult to talk openly to their parents about their problems; peer mediation addresses this by allowing students to find comfort in talking to peers who have had similar experiences. Adolescence is also a stage where adolescents may become confused and disturbed by various conflicts in their lives, in which adolescents often find it difficult to make lasting commitments. During this stage, Erikson contended, adolescents may not be sure what they want to do or who they are, and they may experience isolation. One of the goals of a conflict resolution program that includes a peer mediation process is to provide opportunities for trained peer mediators to listen to other adolescents in conflict, rather than judging them. Conflict resolution programs also provide strategies that empower adolescents to resolve their conflicts.

### **Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

The conceptual framework for this study was also based on Freire's (1968) [name the specific theory/model/etc that you are using from this]. Freire, a major theorist in societal development, conducted work as a Brazilian educator that has significantly

impacted the way that individuals view oppression. Freire worked with poor people in Brazil and described how they faced daily oppression. Freire's most significant work is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) in which Freire describes the struggle of people living under oppressed conditions for freedom. Freire contended that freedom is a struggle that exists between the oppressor and the oppressed. Freire also argued that positive societal change will emerge only from the education of oppressed groups who need to understand the obstacles that block their hopes.

Freire (1968) is also one of the creators of modern critical theory. Critical theory, according to Freire, is the examination and critique of systematic forms of injustice. Freire's beliefs about critical theory are important to the field of conflict resolution because critical theory gives educational practitioners and scholars the necessary framework to assist individuals in overcoming societal and personal injustices. The ultimate goal of critical theory is to transform societal relationships and institutions that are exploitative, creating a more equitable society. According to Freire, conflict occurs when oppressors fail to realize that others are treated unjustly. Freire argued that oppressors believe that the oppressed are less human than they are; therefore, the oppressed become powerless because the oppressors hold all of the power. Freire contended that critical theory has been used to explain and confront the oppression of various populations such as African Americans; Native Americans; women; physically and mentally challenged individuals; and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender groups.

Freire's (1968) theoretical constructs about oppression are the foundation for conflict resolution because social oppression impacts society by dehumanizing some



individuals and giving power to certain groups at the expense of others. Freire believed that love for other humans is the foundation for eliminating societal oppression. Freire called for the liberation of the oppressed. In order for this liberation to take place, Freire believed that there must be recognition of the problem from both the oppressed and the oppressors. In conflict resolution programs that include a peer mediation process, adolescents must also be willing to acknowledge their conflicts in front of their peers, so that all parties in the mediation process are able to communicate.

### **Nature of the Study**

For this qualitative study, I used a single case study research design. Yin (2009) defined case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). In addition, Yin noted, “A case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of the theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p. 18). Thus, Yin argued that the strength of case study research includes the logic of the design, multiple data collection techniques, and specific approaches to data analysis.

I selected a case study design for this study for two reasons. First, the phenomenon for this study was the role of peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program. The boundaries between this phenomenon and the context of an

urban high school setting are not always clear, and a case study design uses rich, thick description to explore those boundaries. Second, a case study design relies on the collection of data from multiple sources because the study may involve more variables than data points,(Yin, 2014). For this study, therefore, data were collected from individual interviews with trained peer mediators, reflective journals maintained by these trained peer mediators, and archival program data in order to present a rich description of these variables.

In relation to the methodology, the unit of analysis for this study was an urban high school conflict resolution program in a large public school district located in a southern state. This urban high school was purposefully selected because a conflict resolution program that includes peer mediation was effectively implemented over a period of years at this site. I planned to include six student participants from this high school for this study. These potential participants were selected using purposeful sampling, based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) participants must be enrolled in the high school selected as the research site for this study, (b) participants must have participated in the conflict resolution program as peer mediators at this research site, (c) participants must have received training as peer mediators at this research site, and (d) participants must have parental permission to participate in this study.

I collected study data from multiple sources of evidence, including individual interviews with peer mediators, reflective journals completed by peer mediators, and archival records and documents of conflict resolution programs. One of the documents that I planned to collect was the original grant application for this research site, which

included information about program goals and expected outcomes, the role of peer mediators, and program structure and activities. I also planned to collect program evaluations of the conflict resolution program. In addition, I planned to collect documents related to peer mediation training.

Data for this single case study were analyzed at two levels. At the first level, the specific analytical techniques of coding and categorization was used to analyze the interview and reflective journal data for each case. Line-by-line coding was used, as recommended by Charmaz (2006), to stay as close to the data as possible. A content analysis was conducted for the review of archival records and documents. At the second level, the constant comparative method was used to analyze the coded and categorized data across all sources of data to determine emerging themes and discrepant data (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). These themes and discrepant data were the basis for the findings of this study, which are presented in relation to the primary and secondary research questions and interpreted in relation to the conceptual framework and the literature review.

### **Definitions**

*Bullying:* Repeated behaviors intended to hurt or harm another either psychologically or physically with one party exhibiting more power over the other. Linked to aggression and fighting, the imbalance of power, repetition and sometimes nonphysical nature set bullying apart from physical and aggressive acts (Agervold, 2007).

*Conflict:* A struggle between people with opposing values, needs, ideas, beliefs, or goals. Conflict can exist even if only one person acknowledges the struggle.

Unresolved conflict has the potential of choosing an individual or an organization significantly and can lead to aggression or violence (Algert, 2004). Conflict is a cultural behavior that is not to be judged desirable or undesirable (Chew, 2001).

*Conflict resolution programs:* Programs that have been effectively designed to reduce social conflict as a result of a conscious settlement of issues in dispute and programs that achieve peace through violence prevention and conflict resolution objectives (Shellenberg, 1996).

*Culture:* A concept that includes superficial group differences that are generally associated with descriptions of traditional, stereotypical modes of behavior, characteristic of some group of others (Avruch & Black, 1993). Not reducible to behavior, culture is often a label for group differences or as a way of naming these groups, especially in conflict situations (Chew, 2001).

*Cultural competency:* For this study, as defined in the PAL program training documents, cultural competency means that peer mediators adopt an outreach approach, making contact with other students they do not know or who may be different from them, in order to offer assistance.

*Mediation:* A voluntary process in which disputants strive to find a satisfactory resolution to their dispute. The mediator serves as a facilitator for this process and helps the disputants reach an agreement (Algert, 2004).

*Negotiation:* A discussion between parties aimed at reaching some mutual accord. The purpose of negotiation is to control the conflict in order to form a more effective working relationship between parties (Shellenberg, 1996).

*Peace education:* A philosophy and a process involving skills such as listening, reflection, problem-solving, cooperation, and conflict resolution. The process involves empowering students with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge to create a safe world and build a sustainable environment (Morrison, 2003, as cited by Cook, 2008).

*Peer mediators:* In the context of this study, student facilitators who negotiate a satisfactory agreement between or among their peers by using a conflict resolution process to aid them in reconciling conflicts. A mediator does not impose solutions, assess punishment, administer judgment, decide who is right, or persuade the parties to any side of the dispute (Algert, 2004).

*Restorative justice:* An approach to discipline that engages all parties in a balanced practice that brings together all people impacted by an issue or behavior and that allows students, teachers, families, schools, and communities to resolve conflict, promote academic achievement, and address school safety. Restorative justice practices in schools are often seen as building on existing relationships and are complementary with other non-discipline practices, such as peer mediation and youth court (Gonzalez, 2012).

*Social conflict:* An opposition between individuals and groups on the basis of competing interests, different identities, and /or differing attitudes (Shellenberg, 1996 ).

*Social justice:* A state of affairs in which inequalities of wealth, power, access, and privilege inequalities that affect not merely individuals but entire classes of people are eliminated or greatly decreased (Bush & Folger, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

This study was based on several assumptions. The first assumption was that the conflict resolution program implemented in this public school district at the high school level was supported by the school board and the central office administrators and that these educational leaders would provide me with contact information regarding students who participated as peer mediators in this conflict resolution program. This assumption was important to this study because I would not be able to collect relevant data from peer mediators without receiving this permission. The second assumption was that all participants in this study answered the interview and reflective journal questions openly and honestly. This assumption was important because the findings of this study needed to be trustworthy. Another assumption was that the administrator of the conflict resolution program would be able to provide me with program documents and archival records in order to draw a comparison between the interview and reflective journal data from peer mediators and the documents and archival records about expected and achieved outcomes for the conflict resolution program. This assumption was important because I needed to compare the expectations and evaluations of this conflict resolution program with the perceptions of trained peer mediators.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study includes one urban high school conflict resolution program in a large public school district located in a southern state. One case was presented as the unit of analysis. I purposefully selected students from an urban high

school who participated as trained peer mediators in this conflict resolution program at the research site.

This study was further delimited by time and resources. I conducted this study during the 2014-2015 school year. As a single researcher, I had limited time and resources to conduct this study, and therefore, I chose to conduct this study in a public school district in the state where I resided.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of a study are generally related to the research design. Because I was the sole person responsible for all data collection and data analysis for this multiple case study, the potential for researcher bias existed. According to Merriam (2009), researchers need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken by using a strategy called reflexivity. The use of this strategy allows the reader to better understand how the individual researcher might have arrived at a particular interpretation of the data. For this study, I examined my biases concerning how conflict resolution programs should be implemented, particularly in relation to the training of peer mediators because I have led this type of training in other school districts. In order to examine my biases, I maintained a researcher's journal, recommended by Merriam for qualitative researchers, that I used to monitor the research process. This journal included reflections, questions, or problems that I experienced while collecting and analyzing the data. In addition to this strategy of reflexivity, I describe other strategies in Chapter 3, such as triangulation and member checks, that I used to improve the trustworthiness of this qualitative research.

### **Significance**

The significance of the study can be determined in relation to research on the topic, to practice in the field, to the development of educational policy, and to implications for positive social change in education. In relation to research, the findings of this study may encourage other researchers to explore the role of trained peer mediators in conflict resolution programs in other school districts in different states. In addition, other studies could be conducted about the effectiveness of peer mediators in conflict resolution programs at the elementary or middle school level where these programs often begin. In relation to practice in the field, this study provides recommendations to help school counselors develop more effective early interventions that use peer mediators as a way of deescalating various types of conflict that students experience in public schools.

This study also provides recommendations that will help school counselors develop more effective resources for working with young adolescents in resolving conflicts peaceably and how to effectively monitor training programs involving conflict resolution skills. In relation to educational policy, this study provides recommendations that may help local school boards and superintendents develop more effective policies concerning the development and implementation of conflict resolution programs that include peer mediation services. Concerning positive social change, the research literature indicates that students often do not have the necessary skills to form healthy relationships in a school setting. Learning these skills through conflict resolution programs, particularly through the role of peer mediation, may give students the



opportunity to resolve conflicts in a school setting through the use of nonviolence and to develop improved communication and decision-making skills that ultimately benefit society.

### **Summary**

In summary, this chapter provided an introduction to the study. Background information included a summary of current research related to conflict resolution programs and the role of peer mediators. The research gap was that limited qualitative research has been conducted about the role of trained peer mediators in urban conflict resolution programs. Therefore, the primary research question for this study explored how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacts high school students trained as peer mediators. The conceptual framework for this study was based on Erikson's (1950, 1982) psychosocial theory about the stages of human development and Freire's (1968) critical theory of the oppressed in society.

In relation to methodology, this chapter included a description of the research design of this study, which is a single case study, and the data collection and data analysis procedures. Data were collected from multiple sources, including interviews and reflective journals from current high school students who participated as trained peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program and from documents and archival records related to this urban high school conflict resolution program. In particular, I planned to collect the following documents and archival records: (a) the original grant proposal, which described program goals and expected outcomes, the role of peer mediators, and program structure and activities, (b) evaluations of the conflict

resolution program, and (c) training materials related to the peer mediation process used in this urban conflict resolution program.

This chapter also included a description of the data analysis plan. I analyzed data at two levels. At the first level, I planned to use the specific analytical techniques of coding and categorization to examine the data. I used line-by-line coding that Charmaz (2006) recommended to develop codes and categories for the interview and journal data. I conducted a content analysis for the document review. At the second level, I used the general analytic technique of theory development to analyze the coded and categorized data across all sources of data (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). As recommended by Merriam, I used the constant comparative method to find emerging themes and discrepant data. These themes and discrepant data formed the findings of this study, which I analyzed in relation to the research questions and interpreted in relation to the conceptual framework and the literature review. Definitions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study were also included in this chapter.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature related to the conceptual framework of this study and to current research about the development and implementation of conflict resolution programs in public schools. In addition, this chapter presents a summary and conclusions that include the major themes and gaps found in this review.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

Adolescents in the United States, particularly those individuals with emotional problems, often struggle to make good decisions concerning how to handle conflict with peers and adults at school. Adolescent conflicts often escalate because these adolescents and their peers, teachers, and administrators do not know how to respond to these disagreements and confrontations in a nonaggressive or productive manner. As a result, multiple conflict resolution programs have been developed and implemented in U.S. public schools as an initiative to decrease violence and anti-social behavior among students. These conflict resolution programs frequently include peer mediation components in which selected students are trained to assist the disputants in reaching a peaceable solution to their problems. However, little qualitative research has been conducted on the impact of these conflict resolution programs on peer mediators, particularly in urban high schools. This study was designed to address this research gap to explore how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacts high school students who are trained as peer mediators to resolve conflicts among their peers.

Research has been conducted about the development and implementation of conflict resolution programs in public school settings. In a study about the management of conflict in urban schools in the southern part of the United States, Harris and Walton (2008) examined the narratives of elementary school students to determine how these students resolved conflicts and found that students who use communication skills to

handle their conflicts write stories that contain low levels of violence as opposed to students who do not use communication skills to handle their conflicts and write stories that contain high levels of violence. Heydenberk and Heydenberk (2007) examined the use of conflict resolution in primary classrooms to resolve bullying behaviors and found that successful conflict resolution programs depend on the development of cognitive and social skills, which are necessary in creating a caring community. In an evaluation of a collaborative multimedia conflict resolution curriculum, Goldsworthy, Schwartz, Barab, and Landa (2006) found that the social problem-solving skills of students improve when using they use the strategies of the STAR program, which involves “stop, think, act, and reflect”. Pavelka (2013) examined several conflict resolution programs in public schools that used restorative justice practices and found that these practices include strong leadership, vision, and teacher and student empowerment. In a study about conflict resolution and perceptions of bullying, Heydenberk and Heydenberk (2006) found that a successful conflict resolution program is dependent on the development of students’ social skills and cognitive abilities.

Some research has also been conducted about the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs in a public school setting. Yacco and Smith (2010) investigated multiparty student conflict at the middle school level and found that multiparty conflict is more complex than dyadic and school counselors should consider using only trained adults to handle these type of conflicts. Roberts, Yeomans, and Ferro-Almeida (2007) evaluated a particular conflict resolution program called Project WIN (Working out Integrated Negotiation), and they found Project Win reduces violence among middle

school students in a low-income urban area of Pennsylvania. In a study about restorative justice and bullying, Duncan (2011) suggested that benefits of restorative justice programs include reducing recidivism, cutting costs, increasing victim and citizen satisfaction, and improving community safety.

The research literature is more limited about the role of peer mediation in conflict resolution programs, although some significant studies exist. Nix and Hale (2007) examined how peer mediators resolved conflict in an at-risk school involving middle school students. They found the demographics of a school alter the mediation process and that students from different backgrounds have different goals for dispute resolution. Cantrell, Savage, and Rehfuss (2007) examined a conflict resolution program known as the Peace Pal program and found that this program reduces the number of out-of-school suspensions and number of verbal conflicts among elementary school students. Morgado and Oliveria (2010) also explored the peer mediation process for resolving conflicts and found that peer mediators learn how to manage conflicts while other students learn social skills, self-esteem, and empathy for others. Hendry (2010) reviewed current research on peer mediation in schools and found mediation training is effective for students and adults in learning conflict resolution skills. Wing (2009) explored growing concerns about inequality and fairness associated with mediation practices and found that it is important for mediators to remain neutral. Kacmaz (2011) examined the perspectives of elementary school students about their mediation practices and found that students improve their empathy skills, which they also use outside the school to conduct mediation

among family members and in the community. Thus, a review of the literature indicated that the problem of how conflict resolution programs impact peer mediators is relevant.

This chapter includes a review of the literature in relation to conflict resolution programs in public schools and the role of peer mediators in those programs. This review is divided into the following sections: (a) the literature search strategy, (b) current research related to the conceptual framework based on Erikson's (1950, 1982) psychosocial theory of the stages of human development and Freire's (1968) critical theory of the pedagogy of the oppressed, (c) a historical perspective of conflict resolution, (d) perspectives on conflict and culture, (e) the development and implementation of conflict resolution programs in public schools, (f) the role of peer mediators in conflict resolution programs, (g) the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs, (h) a review of similar and differing methodologies, and (i) a summary and conclusion that includes the major themes and gaps found in this review.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

For this single case study, I used several search strategies to review literature about conflict resolution programs and the role of peer mediators in these programs. The first strategy that I used involved the use of databases including Academic Search Complete, Agricola EBSCOhost, ERIC, MasterFile Premier, GreenFILE, Health Source: Consumer Edition, Library Information Science and Technology, Newspaper Source, Primary Search, Professional Development Collection, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, Religion and Philosophy Collection, Science and Technology Collection, Teacher Reference Center, TOPICsearch, World History Collection, and Biography

Reference Bank. Another strategy that I used was to review federal reports published by the United States Department of Education, the Department of Justice, and the Centers for Disease Control to determine current statistics on conflict resolution programs in the United States. An additional strategy that I used was to review books and dissertations related to the topics of conflict resolution and peer mediation. I considered the following key words to conduct this search: *bullying, case studies on conflict resolution, case studies on peer mediation, conflict, conflict resolution and public schools, conflict resolution programs and public school education, adolescent identity, mediation and public schools, negotiation and public schools, peace education and public schools, peer mediation and public schools, peer mediators and public schools, restorative justice and public schools, social justice and public schools, and violence in public schools.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Erikson's (1982) psychosocial theory of human development and Freire's (1968) critical theory of oppression. In this section, I briefly describe Erikson's theory about the stages of human development and Friere's critical theory about oppression and present an analysis of how these theories have been applied in current research. I conclude this section with a discussion of how and why these theories relate to this study.

#### **Erikson's Stages of Human Development**

Erickson's (1982) psychosocial theory of human development divides the the human development cycle into eight stages: (a) infancy, (b) early childhood, (c) play age, (d) school age, (e) adolescence, (f) young adulthood, (g) adulthood, and (h) old age.

Erikson argued that social crises or conflicts are resolved at each stage of human development. In the infancy stage, the crisis that must be resolved is trust versus mistrust. The infant begins to interact with a loved one or caretaker. Caregivers may be inconsistent in the care of a child, creating mistrust.

In the second stage, early childhood, the crisis that must be resolved is autonomy versus shame. This stage involves the child's second and third year of life. Children began to use their hands to hold on to objects. Children become independent by choosing their own clothes and toys. In this stage, children are also toilet trained. Sometimes children want to snuggle up to their parents, and yet at other times they may push the parents or loved ones away. When this happens, Erikson noted, children are exercising their sense of autonomy.

According to Erikson (1950, 1982), the third stage, play age, occurs between the ages of three and six years old. The crisis that must be resolved is initiative versus guilt. Children will experience rivalry with the same sex parent for the affection of the parent of the opposite sex. Children learn quickly in this stage. If parents are supportive of their children initiative, children may develop a purpose. If children are punished for showing initiative, then doubt will enter a child's life.

In the fourth stage, school age, the crisis that must be resolved is industry versus inferiority. This stage takes place from 6-11 years of age. Conflict may enter a child's life at this stage, especially in relation to the birth of a sibling. Children also begin school and learn to master cognitive and social skills. If the caretaker supports the child, the child



will be industrious. If the caretaker is not supportive, the child develops feelings of inferiority.

The fifth stage is adolescence, and the crisis that adolescents must resolve during this stage is identity versus role confusion. Adolescents may be confused by physical changes in their bodies. It may be difficult for adolescents to make commitments because they are often only concerned about the here and now. If adolescents can resolve this crisis, Erikson noted, they develop their identity; if not, they enter into role confusion.

The sixth stage is young adulthood from ages 20 to 24, and the crisis that young adults must resolve during this stage is intimacy versus isolation. At this stage, young adults form deeper relationships that are filled with intimate love and romance. Marriage may sometimes occur before these deeper relationships are formed. This stage is based on identity development. If an individual fails to resolve this crisis of intimacy at this stage, isolation may be the result. Once individuals master intimacy, Erikson argued, they move to the seventh stage, which is adulthood.

In the seventh stage, which is the adult stage, the crisis that individuals must resolve is generativity versus stagnation. In this stage, adults want to be nurturing, and they understand that other people that may outlive them. During this stage, adults often have children, and they guide and protect them. If this crisis is not resolved, Erikson believed that adults enter into stagnation or depression.

In the last stage, old age, the crisis that the elderly must resolve is that of ego integrity versus despair. At this stage, the elderly often deal with physical illness and failing health as well as social issues. Erikson noted that individuals experience an inner

struggle for growth and wisdom, and the crisis that the elderly must resolve during this stage is ego integrity versus despair. It is a time of reflection on past experiences and coming to terms with those experiences. If individuals cannot accept their past decisions, they often face despair.

In relation to Erikson's (1950, 1982) psychosocial theory about the stages of human development, several studies have been conducted that demonstrate the application of this theory to research on conflict resolution, particularly during the adolescent state of human development when the crisis of identity versus role confusion must be resolved. In a study related to peer group identity, Hartnett (2008) focused on the influence of peer group identity on absenteeism in high school. Hartnett reviewed the attendance policies in public school districts in Seattle and Spokane, Washington. Hartnett found that the culture of a school setting contributes to how student experience the system and that the characteristics and culture of a school influences student absenteeism and truancy. Individuals may identify with other peer groups based on intellectual achievement or attitudes. Hartnett also found that teenagers are susceptible to environmental influences because they are still growing intellectually, emotionally, and physically. High school students want to be accepted by their peers, and therefore, they often belong to a group. Hartnett found that peer identity is crucial in the development of adolescents. Peer groups are more powerful than parents when shaping values. Hartnett found that when students are rejected by other students, they start to oppose school values. Students soon learn to disconnect with school when they believe adults and peers at school do not support them, and this lack of support may lead to absenteeism from

school. Harnett concluded that teachers and students need to develop positive relationships with each other in order to reduce absenteeism. This study supports Erikson's (1982) argument that adolescents must resolve a crisis between identity and role confusion if they are to become successful young adults.

In another study related to Erikson's (1950, 1982) stages of human development, Yamaguchi, Kuhlmeier, Wynn and vanMarie (2009) examined the continuity in social cognition from infancy to early childhood. Participants included 32 four-year-olds. In this study, infants were shown a movie of an animated circle climbing a hill. The circle was helped up the hill by a triangle or pushed down the hill by a square. The infants seem to look longer at the helping agent, the triangle, as opposed to the hindering agent, the square, suggesting that infants recognize the difference between the helping agent and the hindering one.

Yamaguchi et al. (2009) derived two important implications.. First, meaningful individual differences in social cognition appear early in infancy and are developmentally stable, at least for the first four to five years of life. Second, the correlation across development holds for children who as infants participated in tasks that involved goal directed behavior. Yamaguchi et al. concluded that a possible relationship exists between infant social cognition and cognitive development in the preschool years, but more longitudinal studies are needed to determine that relationship. This study supports Erikson's theory that infants must resolve a crisis of trust versus mistrust in order to progress to the next stage of human development.

In a related study about adolescents, Wymbs, Pelham, and Gnagy (2008) explored mother and adolescent reports of interparental discord among parents of adolescents with and without attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Wymbs et al. collected data from adolescents with childhood ADHD, from adolescents with oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder, and from their mothers' maternal and adolescent reports of interparental discord. Wymbs et al. found that students who have ADHD in addition to conduct disorder are often involved in more conflict than adolescents with ADHD and oppositional defiant disorder. Wymbs et al. also found that parental functioning is affected in these families. However, not enough evidence exists to show that parents of children with ADHD are at a greater risk for interparental discord than parents of children without ADHD. Wymbs et al. concluded that parents who use medication as the only means to treat their ADHD children should consider working with teachers to implement behavioral interventions. Wymbs et al. draws a critical connection between interparental conflict and the behavioral problems of youth.

Erikson's theory about the adolescence stage of human development also supports Wymbs's study. Erikson noted that adolescents may find it difficult to be close to their parents and may feel overwhelmed by social conflicts and demands. The crisis that adolescents must resolve before they can progress to the next stage of human development, according to Erikson, is identity versus role confusion. According to Erickson, this identity formation is a lifelong process.

### **Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed**

Freire (1968) was one of the creators of critical theory. The goal of critical theory is to transform societies and institutions that are exploitative into more equitable ones. According to Freire's theory of oppression, education is a major factor contributing to the oppression of individuals in society. Freire argued that education suffers from *narration sickness* because teachers are simply narrators and students memorize their narrations. Freire argued that this narration sickness leads to the act of depositing, which he called the *banking* concept.

In this concept, those students who possess knowledge are considered superior to those students who know nothing. When ignorance is projected onto others, Freire (1968) maintained that this practice is characteristic of oppression, which occurs when individuals have their humanity stolen from them. Freire referred to this act as dehumanization. In order for individuals to become liberated, Freire argued, they must recognize the problem of oppression. When this recognition takes place, freedom can occur. However, Freire also argued that a price must be paid for freedom because a struggle or conflict must first emerge between the oppressors and the oppressed. Freire argued that because the oppressed are dependent on their oppressors, they are not able to speak their minds freely without experiencing fear. Even today, Freire believed, fear exists within students who are not able to express their feelings or thoughts in the classroom.

Several recent studies have demonstrated the application of Freire's theory to research on conflict resolution. Pearrow (2008) presented a critical examination of an

urban-based youth program called Teen Empowerment, which focused on six key elements of empowerment. These elements included a safe environment, participation and engagement, power sharing between youth and adults, engagement in critical reflection, participation in a socio-political process to effect change, and an integrated individual and community level of empowerment. Teen Empowerment is a program designed for adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 in order to empower them to create positive social change. Pearrow maintained that a critical and conceptual understanding of power is the foundation for generating strategies to examine the powerless. Pearrow argued that empowerment is a process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can improve their life situations. Pearrow also believed that youth have the capacity to make meaningful change in their community. In examining the Teen Empowerment program, Pearrow found that program personnel assist adolescents in creating social change by giving them decision-making powers. Students learn to analyze problems in school and the community setting. Students are recruited through flyers and by community members, and they attend a 10 day workshop to learn how to build relationships with peers. Pearrow found that this urban youth program reduces rates of delinquency, school dropouts, and substance abuse. Pearrow concluded that a critical understanding of power is the foundation for generating strategies to address the powerlessness of an individual, a family, and a social system. This study supports Freire's argument that two stages are associated with a pedagogy of the oppressed. The first stage requires commitment to change. After that initial

commitment is made, the second stage requires that pedagogy become the responsibility of all individuals in the process of permanent liberation.

In a discussion of the current status and future direction of critical consciousness, Watts, Diemer, and Voight (2011) analyzed Freire's (1968) construct of critical consciousness in relation to youth development. Watts et al. noted that most scholars consider that social action aimed at the roots of social injustice is near the periphery of theory and research on civil engagement. Critical consciousness refers to how oppressed people learn to analyze their social conditions while working to change them. Watts et al. maintained that youth can benefit from understanding social injustice and how to make a more just society. According to Watts et al., critical consciousness is composed of critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. Critical reflection refers to the rejection of economic, racial, and social inequities in society. Political efficacy refers to the ability of individuals to create social and political change, and critical action refers to changing unjust aspects of society. Watts et al. concluded that a holistic approach is essential when working with young people to create positive social change. This research is supported by Freire's theory of the oppressed. Freire argued that individuals must be willing to give total, not partial, commitment to the struggle for freedom. Freire also believed that people who are oppressed must realize that they need to accept responsibility for the struggle. Freedom can be achieved, Freire noted, only if it is conquered, rather than given freely.

Freire (1968) also believed that critical thinking is essential to creating knowledge and achieving freedom from oppression. In supporting discussion about creating a foundation for the development of intellectual values, Kuhn (2009) noted that knowledge

is a critical foundation for intellectual values, which is important to educational outcomes. Kuhn defined intellectual values as standards that people think are important such as knowledge and skills. Although feelings may be attached to these values, so are attitudes and beliefs. Kuhn maintained that by late adolescence, individuals have often achieved the understanding that although everyone has a right to their opinions, some opinions are more right than others, to the extent that they are better supported by argument and evidence. According to Kuhn, three criteria must be met if individuals are to engage in scientific thinking that develops these intellectual values. These criteria include the following: (a) the theoretical claim must be recognized as falsified, (b) evidence must be considered as a means for falsification, and (c) evidence must be distinguished from theory. Like Kuhn, Freire also argued that students must become critical thinkers. According to Freire, however, teachers often talk about reality as if it were motionless and predictable, and students are not encouraged to think critically. Freire believed that knowledge and ultimately freedom only emerges through the critical thinking process of invention and re-invention that humans engage in with each other.

In summary, these studies support the research by Erikson (1950, 1982) and Freire (1968) that the adolescent stage is critical to the development of an individual. In the adolescence stage of human development, Erickson argued that adolescents struggle to find their own identity and desire to be accepted by their peers. Conflict resolution programs that target at-risk youth create safer environments in schools and communities because these programs often help adolescents to recognize a sense of meaning and purpose in society. Both Erikson and Freire believed that adolescents have the power to



contribute to positive social change in society if they are able to resolve the crisis of identity and develop positive social relationships with other people. Freire argued that becoming empowered can be fearful since people who are oppressed often do not know what to expect. These theories are important to this study because conflict resolution programs are designed to help students resolve conflicts with their peers. Students who are trained to mediate conflicts among their peers often become empowered themselves by helping others.

### **Historical Perspective of Conflict Resolution**

To understand the historical perspective of conflict resolution is critical to understanding conflict in modern society. Therefore, this section include an analysis of research about how conflicts were resolved during biblical times and during the emergence of the early church. In addition, this section includes an analysis of research about how conflict was addressed in the early history of the United States and how conflict is addressed in the United States today, particularly in relation to cultural issues.

In *Genesis of Justice*, Dershowitz (2000), a trial lawyer and law professor, described how conflicts were resolved in biblical times by presenting stories of injustice that led to the 10 commandments and the development of modern morality and law. In the first biblical story of Adam and Eve, Dershowitz argued that God punishes Adam and Eve differently for disobeying Him, establishing gender as a source of conflict. Dershowitz also noted that God threatens death as a consequence for disobedience but allows Adam and Eve to live. In the story of Cain and Abel, Cain murders his younger brother and hides this act from God. Dershowitz noted that God punishes Cain by making

him a fugitive and a wanderer, even though he commits murder. In the story of Noah, God floods the world for 40 days in order to cleanse the world of human sin. Dershowitz argued that with the promise that God made to Noah never to destroy the world again, men and women now understood the need for laws to resolve conflict. With the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, however, Dershowitz maintained that God teaches Abraham a lesson about the inherent limitations of human justice and how to strike an appropriate balance in punishing the guilty. In the story of Abraham and his son Isaac, God commands Abraham to kill his son, Isaac, but at the last minute, an angel appears to Abraham and warns him not to kill his son. Dershowitz concluded that God is trying to teach Abraham that in accepting a covenant with Him, sacrifices are often required, as history has often demonstrated. In yet another biblical story, Rebecca, Isaac's wife, gives birth to Jacob and Esau, who are rivals even in their mother's womb. As the sons grow into men, Jacob and Rebecca conspire to steal Esau's birthright, which further fractures their relationship. Dershowitz argued that Jacob is born into a world with few rules, and therefore, he is not punished for his sins, even though the conflict between the brothers is eventually resolved. In another biblical story of injustice, Dina, the daughter of Jacob and Leah, is raped by Shekhem and avenged by her brothers who punish the innocent and the guilty by killing every male in Shekhem's clan. Dershowitz argued that the relative guilt or innocence of the avenging brothers has continued to be debated, particularly in relation to modern day vigilantism. Dershowitz maintained that the story of Tamar is the first biblical account of a criminal trial in which Tamar is permitted to present her case, and the death sentence is reversed, only because Judah is a benevolent ruler who is willing to

admit his error. In the story of Joseph and his brothers, Joseph is sold into bondage by his brothers who deceive their father by making him think Joseph has been torn apart by wild animals. Dershowitz argued that the story of Joseph “forms the prelaw predicate for the intricate and innovative system of legal protections found in later books of the Bible: the requirement for two witnesses, the protection against self-incrimination, the prohibition against double jeopardy, the difficulty of imposing capital punishment, and the strong commendation against punishing the innocent” (p. 195).

Dershowitz concluded that the Book of Genesis includes many examples of how conflicts are resolved. Dershowitz added:

There are certainly enough untrammelled passions and lawlessness in in Genesis to justify the need for a formal legal system. We see Cain’s murder insufficiently punished, and Cain eventually rewarded with the role as builder of cities. We see Lot rapped by his daughters, and Dina humbled by a man who comes to love her. That man and his entire clan are then tricked and massacred by brothers who become tribal leaders of Israel. We see Jacob deceiving and deceived, Joseph falsely accused and then planting evidence so that his treacherous brothers are also falsely accused. There are no explicit rules governing such behavior, and what few general rules exist are changed at the whim of the rule maker. Hardly a positive picture of the law in action.

However, Dershowitz argued that Genesis presents a world seeking systematic rules, a world that is “evolving toward a system of formal justice under which rules are announced in advance and applied fairly by a complex process of justice” (p. 198).

Dershowitz believed the Bible includes stories of injustice to teach people about the need for justice. Dershowitz also believed that understanding the complexities of justice, both historical and contemporary, requires an understanding of the people of Genesis as they struggle to suppress the evil inclinations that all humans possess.

Throughout the history of humankind, the church also played an important role in solving conflicts. In *The Mediation Process*, Moore (1986) noted that church members often considered the clergy as mediators when disagreements arose. Moore maintained that during the Middle Ages, the Catholic church was considered a key institution in mediating conflicts among individuals, including family disputes, criminal cases, and disputes among nobles. The Catholic church often provided offenders with a place of refuge during the resolution of a dispute. Moore also noted that the Jewish rabbinical courts in Europe were instrumental in mediating disputes among its members. These courts gave the Jewish people a formal means of dispute resolution. In a discussion about mediation in the Church of England, Fielding (2012) noted that one of the benefits of mediation is freedom, and when conflicts are resolved, all involved parties experience freedom.

The practice of conflict resolution and mediation was not limited to Western civilization, as Moore noted (1986), but was also found in Eastern civilization in countries such as China and Japan, where a strong emphasis was placed on social consensus, moral persuasion, and harmony in human relations. Moore also noted that in Japan in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, warlords used performance bonds as a form of conflict resolution, in which they required individuals to post a bond or reserve a

predetermined amount of money for payment of debts. Eventually, Moore pointed out, humans began to stray away from the use of religion to mediate conflict and to develop their own laws and rules for society.

The practice of conflict resolution and mediation was also found in African societies. In a study about managing conflicts in pre-colonial West African societies, Kouassi (2008) examined negotiation, mediation, and other nonjuridical ways of managing conflict. Oaths and rituals were used to ensure that parties such as opposing groups or communities were not in violation of an agreement. By using oaths, Kouassi noted that tribal members brought ritual objects together, and the gods were invited to preside over the ceremonies. Those tribal members who violated the agreement were punished by the gods, because the oath ensured the preservation of peace. In relation to various rituals that were performed, disputants often drank a mixture of herbs and powders that they believed would guarantee peace for decades between the disputing parties. Marriage was also seen as a way of preventing conflict. Kouassi noted that in these African societies, marriage was understood as a promise of peace that sealed relations between communities. Today in Africa, through the moot court, Moore (1986) noted that individuals in conflict also participate in court proceedings in order to resolve conflicts with their neighbors.

In the early development of the United States, conflict was often addressed through physical confrontations such as dueling. In a discussion of dueling in the early republic of the United States, Bell (2009) noted that in the 1700s and 1800s, duels, such as the one between Aaron Burr, who was the Vice President of the United States, and Alexander Hamilton, who was the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, were

often considered to be a more civilized way to end disputes since only the disputing parties could incur any fatal consequences. In this particular case, these two men had been political rivals for years. Tension rose again when Burr accused Hamilton of character defamation. Hamilton was fatally wounded by Burr in 1804. Bell noted that although dueling was illegal in most states, it had become an accepted ritual of honor. Even though most duels were not fatal, dueling was so prevalent in the decades after Hamilton's death that scores of men fell by pistols and swords on fields of honor across the United States.

Conflict was often addressed through war, as Bell (2009) noted, in the early history of the United States, beginning with the Revolutionary War in 1776 to obtain independence from Great Britain. Skirmishes and wars with other countries followed, including the War of 1812 with Great Britain. Wars between other countries and territories of the United States also occurred. In 1845, President Polk sent John Slidell as a minister to Mexico to present the claims of American citizens and to purchase land from Mexico. Polk believed that Mexico owed this land to the United States for injuries to the citizens of Texas during the time that Texas gained its independence from Mexico. Even though Slidell was willing to compromise with the Mexican government, Mexican officials were not. Polk declared war against Mexico. Santa Anna, the President of Mexico, ordered military force against the Texas Army at the Alamo. The Alamo finally fell to the Mexican Army after 13 days. However, the fight for Texas independence was eventually won following a long conflict.

In a discussion about the unequal distribution of racial empowerment by police, Cooper (2001) argued that the Civil War began because President Lincoln and Republican radicals refused to engage in a compromise with Southern moderates who demanded an expansion of slavery. In 1861, Confederates fired the first shots on Fort Sumter, a fort held by Union troops. The war between the North and South continued for 4 years, noted, with over 600,000 thousand soldiers dead and countless number of injuries. Cooper concluded that the legacy of the Civil War is still evident in the United States today, particularly in relation to racially discriminatory policing. Cooper contended that mediation is conducted less frequently in black communities than white communities. Cooper recommended that mediation partnerships between the police and black communities should be formed in order to empower disputing parties to reach a collective resolution.

Another major source of conflict in the United States and other countries was the civil rights movement, which demonstrated how conflict could often be resolved in nonviolent ways. In a discussion about the relationship between conflict and public humiliation, Linder (2009) noted that in the 1960s, while the civil rights movement in the United States made headlines under the leadership of Martin Luther King, another civil rights movement was taking place thousands of miles away in South Africa. Nelson Mandela, a South African activist who helped bring an end to apartheid, was arrested in 1960 and accused of trying to overthrow the South African government. Mandela was wrongfully imprisoned for 27 years, stripped of his dignity and citizenship. After his release from prison, Mandela became the president of South Africa. Mandela argued that

conflicts are resolved and reconciliation is achieved only when equal rights and dignity for everybody are granted. Linder noted that individuals such as Gandhi, Mandela, and King have shaped how conflict is resolved in the modern world because they used nonviolent approaches. Linder concluded that the human rights movement today represents a normative framework that is adaptive to the interdependence of the modern world and that working together instead of blaming others provides the best way to ensure a peaceful world. Linder suggested that society needs to be humanized so that all individuals can lead dignified lives without being humiliated.

In a discussion about the religious convictions of Martin Luther King, Jr., Randall (2008) argued that Dr. King's Baptist faith led him to study the works of Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian leader who led a campaign of nonviolent civil resistance to British rule that resulted in India's independent in 1947. King followed Gandhi's belief in using nonviolence as a way to resolve the nation's problems through such tactics as organized peaceful marches. King was jailed numerous times as a civil rights activist. In 1963, King was arrested during a nonviolent march in Birmingham Alabama, and it was there that King wrote his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail", in which King spoke out against social injustice. Randall concluded that King believed that he and others would fulfill their mission for social justice as long as they focused on God.

Mahatma Gandhi was another civil rights leader who led a campaign of nonviolent civil resistance to free India from British rule. In 1947 Gandhi practiced the use of nonviolent strategies to resolve personal, social, and political conflicts. In a discussion of Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence for the modern world, Howard (2011)



maintained that Gandhi's focus was on interreligious dialogue in developing nonviolent programs for Indian communities. Gandhi promoted "heart unity" between the Hindus and Muslims in an attempt to resolve their long and bitter disputes. Howard concluded that one of Gandhi's valuable contributions to society was a clear articulation of the relationship between the secular and the spiritual, based on nonviolence and human rights.

A more controversial civil rights activist in the United States was Malcolm X, who had been taught by Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam, that white people were evil and that the United States government was obstructing the struggle for racial equality. In 1964, Malcolm X organized the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) to promote racial equality in all nations. Malcolm X believed that African Americans across the world should combine their resources in order to achieve advancement. In a discussion of ideological perspectives on the future of the civil rights movement, Burrell (2012) maintained that Malcolm X, considered to be a black nationalist, was an intellectual who recognized that the civil rights movement was at a crossroads and used specific strategies to fight for racial equality such as internationalizing the black freedom struggle in order to create unity among African Americans around the world. Burrell concluded that Malcolm X actually contributed to the decline of liberal ideology about racism in the 1960s, which resulted in a conservative backlash.

The civil rights movement in the United States also revealed conflict in relation to gender that is still not resolved today. In a discussion about black women, rape, and

resistance, Dailey (2011) described a new history of the civil rights movement in the United States from Rosa Parks to the rise of black power. Dailey noted that Rosa Parks, a civil rights activist, was arrested on December 1, 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama for refusing to give her seat to a white citizen. Working class black women such as Rosa Parks frequently road the Montgomery city buses daily and often endured abuse from bus drivers. These women organized a bus boycott to protest the arrest of Rosa Parks, which resulted in a protest against the transit system in Montgomery. In 1956, the Supreme Court decision ended the boycott and declared that segregated buses were unconstitutional.

Black women, however, continued to fall victim to injustice at the hands of white men. In 1957, a white Mississippian male was sentenced to 20 years for the rape of a black 16 year old girl. In 1965, Norman Cannon, a white male, was convicted for the kidnapping and sexual assault of a black teenage girl. In 1965, Viola Liuzzo was ambushed and killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan for giving rides in her car to black civil rights protesters (Zeiner, 2013). In 1944, a black woman was kidnapped and raped by a gang of white men in Abbeville, Alabama. In 1959, Betty Jean Owens, a young black woman, was raped by white men in Tallahassee, Florida. Dailey noted that this violence against black women during the civil rights movement was not discussed in the media, and Dailey concluded that attention then and now needs to be brought to the injustices that black women endured during the civil rights movement in the United States.

In addition to the civil rights movement, the idea of conflict resolution evolved more fully in the 1950s and 1960s at the height of the Cold War with the development of nuclear weapons by the superpowers, which threatened human survival (Center for Conflict Resolution, 2000). As a result, researchers in North America and Europe argued a need to study conflict as a general phenomenon with similar properties, whether or not it occurred in international relations, domestic politics, industrial relations, communities, families or between individuals. These individuals established research groups and professional journals, such as the *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, each developing ideas about how to resolve conflict. Thus, the field of research on conflict resolution grew in the 1970s and 1980s as researchers studied war and international crisis more extensively.

In a more recent discussion of conflict resolution, Berger (1998) noted that virtually all human societies experience conflicts, such as those caused by divergent class interests, political aspirations, or ethnic animosities. Berger also noted that sometimes conflict does not occur by choice, but because it is a natural part of society, it is expected, and it has become part of the norm. Berger argued that, in more recent years, conflict in the United States often takes shape as a series of public policy battles between conservative or liberal parties on a wide range of domestic issues, including abortion and reproductive technologies, sexuality, the family, the teaching of values in the public schools, multiculturalism, funding of the arts, the relationship between church and state, and the role of religion in politics. Even though conflict is a natural part of society, Berger concluded that individuals are still responsible for creating a peaceful society. Cooper (2001) argued how that partnerships with mediation centers discourage police

officers from transferring power in interpersonal disputes perpetuate the fundamental social problem of racially discriminatory policing. According to Cooper, police officers either arbitrate the situation or they can empower disputing parties to reach a collective resolution; however whether the latter is available to disputing parties depends on their race. Cooper concluded there is a need to improve the selection process for police officers and to challenge police department institutional phenomena that condone racism and sexism.

In summary, a chronological perspective of conflict resolution indicates that conflict is a natural part of American society in a world that has experienced a history of turmoil since the beginning of time. The Bible chronicles numerous conflicts and injustices that individuals experienced in their journey to discover God. The Christian church also played an early role in resolving family conflicts and disputes between countries. In the early development of the United States, physical confrontation was often considered an appropriate way to end a dispute, as evidenced by the duel between Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr. Conflict was also approached in a nonviolent way through protests organized by civil rights leaders such as Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King, who fought for justice and equality for all people. Today, all nations continue to experience conflict. In the United States, battles over public policy, abortion, family, church and state, and education continue to be fought. Thus, from a historical perspective, conflict is viewed as a natural part of life.

### **Perspectives on Conflict and Culture**

Understanding conflict and culture is necessary as it relates to this study on conflict resolution programs and peer mediation. In a discussion of cultural connections as an alternative to conflict resolution, Traore (2008) noted that conflicts often arise out of interpersonal and intergroup misunderstandings between different groups of students. Traore contended that educators should encourage students to understand that intergroup conflicts are culturally based and may be amenable to resolution through a better understanding and appreciation of different cultures. Chew (2001) also believed that cultural differences often account for conflict in modern society. Chew maintained that culture shapes the ways in which parties understand what conflict is about, how to process it, and what possible solutions look like. The student population in public schools is becoming increasingly diverse, and cultural misunderstandings often lead to conflicts among students. Therefore, in this section, I analyze current research that explores the relationship between conflict and culture, between conflict and gender, between conflict and various racial and ethnic groups, and between conflict and global perspectives.

#### **Conflict and Culture**

Chew (2001) maintained that conflict and its connection to culture is often presented in relation to various inquiries, assumptions, and constructs. In a discussion about conflict resolution in intercultural settings in relation to specific problems and prospects, Avruch and Black (1998) found that culture is often associated with superficial group differences and with traditional, stereotypical modes of behavior, characteristic of some group of others. In an examination of the relationship between culture and

negotiation, Rubin and Sander (1991) noted that individuals need to be aware of the dangers of predicting individual behavior from cultural stereotypes. Lederach (1995) maintained that the inclination of most individuals is to use a prescriptive approach when attempting to resolve conflicts and achieve peace, which often involves experts who consider American culture as the standard by which other cultures should be compared. Lederach also maintained that an elicitive approach should be used instead in order to remain receptive to discovery and creation. This approach has significant implications for conflict resolution trainers who need to become nonjudgmental mediators. In a discussion about deconstructing neutrality in mediation, Cobb and Rifkin (1991) contended that the communication processes used to resolve disputes are not inherently neutral. Rather, mediation is composed of stories and narratives that become part of a political process in that some narratives are dominant and some are suppressed. Cobb and Rifkin concluded that this political process is a function of the following: (a) the mediator's participation in the narrative processes within the session, (b) the structure of the mediation session itself, and (c) the psychological nature of the mediator's discourse about mediation (p. 24). Using numerous historical examples from many different cultures, Nader (1991) found that societal laws have often been used to suppress and coerce individuals. In other research, Ting-Toomey (1985) maintained that conflict is a form of intense communication that is bounded by cultural demands, which dictates appropriate and inappropriate ways of behaving and communicating. In a discussion about using multi-method probes of individualism and collectivism, Triandis, McCusker, and Hui (1990) described a member of an individualist culture as one whose personal goals have primacy

over group goals, family integrity, and harmony within the group. In collectivist cultures, behavior is regulated largely by group norms, whereas in individualist cultures, behavior is regulated by individual likes and dislikes. Triandis et al. found that among lower class women in Mexico, social norms determine if they intended to have children, whereas among upper class Mexican and American women, attitudes predict whether or not they intend to have children.

### **Gender and Conflict**

Current research on conflict, Chew (2001) noted, often includes a discussion about how gender and conflict are related. Taylor and Miller (1994) presented three basic propositions about conflict and gender: (a) it is appropriate, and indeed, important to study conflict in relation gender, (b) gender should be studied as a social construct and not as a matter of biological sex categories, and (c) the nature and power in conflict and how gender modifies that power should be carefully studied (p. 63). In a related discussion about psychological theory and women's development, Gilligan (1993) argued that the process of conflict resolution and moral reasoning cannot be considered without the variable of gender. Grillo (1992) warned that dispute resolutions mandated by the courts often have disproportionate risks for women because traditionally women are caring and subservient in domestic relations, resulting in ineffective outcomes for women. In a study about ethnic and gender differences in mediated conflicts, Grosch, Duffy, and Olczak (1995) examined a mediation program in New York and found that female claimants are more likely to be involved in disputes but have the least potential for violent behavior. Hermann (1994) examined the impact of gender and ethnicity on the

judicial and mediation process in New Mexico and found that black disputants fare worse than white disputants, raising the question of whether or not the traditional mediation process is appropriate in disputes involving ethnic minorities. Hermann noted that in courts, neither gender claimant nor the respondent have impact on monetary outcomes in adjudicated or mediated cases. In a discussion about bias in tort law, Chamallas (1998) found that most studies indicate that women and minority men receive lower monetary awards than white men in personal injury and wrongful death suits. Keashly (1994) presented a summary of psychological research on gender and conflict and found that the meaning of conflict differed for men and women, particularly in relation to workplace disputes. In an essay on gender regulation as a source of religious schism, Zunkerman (1997) found that one of the factors that contributed to the disintegration of a small Jewish community in the Pacific Northwest was disagreement about the appropriate roles for males and females in a religious context. Higgins (1996) described the relationship between anti-essentialism, relativism, and human rights in relation to gender and conflict and found that cultural relativists are committed to the premise that knowledge and truth are culturally contingent and that all cultures are equally valid. Higgins concluded that the feminist view is a product of culture rather than divine will.

### **Conflict and Racial and Ethnic Groups**

Current research on conflict often emphasizes how various racial and ethnic groups in the United States resolve conflict. In a discussion of conflict resolution, cultural differences, and the culture of racism, Galdin (1994) described his experiences as an African American on a college campus. Galdin found that white men often dominate



administration positions due to the color of their skin and because of gender privileges. Galdin noted how white people and people of color often have different understandings about racism and its causes, which results in conflict. In a discussion about moral themes in African American narratives, Ward (1991) found that the political socialization inherent in racial socialization requires the development of a unique relational knowledge base and necessitates the ability to identify and analyze power and authority embedded in interpersonal relationships between blacks and whites. Park (1996) described the uses and abuses of race and culture in relation to Black-Korean tensions. Park found that conflict among nonwhite minorities is often explained as the consequence of increasing immigration and major changes in the social, economic, and demographic structures in society. Erdmans (1995) described conflict within the Polish American community and concluded that culture is dynamic and changing and that the perception that members of an ethnic group are homogeneous should be challenged. Coleman (1996) examined research about individuals who commit violent acts and found that these violent acts are often misunderstood or not accepted because of their cultural beliefs. Coleman concluded that respecting cultural identities is important.

### **Conflict and Global Perspectives**

Significant research explores global perspectives on culture and conflict. Bonta (1996) examined many peaceful societies and found that these societies often shared fundamental worldviews. Many of these societies question the views of Western civilization that punishment is always needed or that outside authorities such as the military should be used to resolve conflict. In a critique of Western conflict resolution

from a nonwestern perspective, Salem (1993) described an Arab perspective in order to understand conflict from another cultural viewpoint. Salem argued that Western nations are more likely to espouse peace in order to preserve the status quo, while Arab nations are attracted to conflict and instability because their countries are in a state of decline. In a discussion of lessons learned and possibilities considered in relation to Eastern and Western conflict resolution approaches, Abu-Nimer (1996) described how a Palestinian village located in Northern Israel resolves community disputes. Abu-Nimer found that the conflict resolution process is focused on restoring social order to the local community relationships rather than on broader social agendas. In a discussion about the relevance of culture for the study of political psychology and ethnic conflict, Ross (1997) defined ethnic groups as cultural units whose distinctiveness is marked by contextually defined features such as language, food, clothing, religion, and a sense of identity and bolstered by an ideology of common descent that places emotional significance on real and fictive ties to relatives. Ross maintained that culture itself does not cause conflict; rather, political groups motivate other individuals to follow their goals. In other research, Gurevitch (1989) offered a compelling explanation about why increased communication between two parties often results in an inability to resolve conflict. In order to make progress in resolving conflicts, Gurevitch suggested that it is important for individuals not to perceive others as strange. Only then does dialogue help individuals create a world of shared meanings. In other research, Hu (1944) explored the Chinese concept of face. Hu noted that the term *Mien-tzu* refers to a kind of prestige and a reputation achieved from getting on in life, and the term *lien* refers to the respect that a man has for a woman

with a good reputation. Hu found that everyone has access to *lien* but *mien-tzu* depends on family status. Hu concluded that norms are important determinants of social behavior in collectivist cultures while attitudes are important determinants in individualist cultures. In another study about global perspectives on conflict, Butterton (1996) described problems in relation to the intellectual property rights of United States citizens in China and found that traditional Chinese society is not guided by the concept of law. The Chinese rely on *li*, which refers to proper conduct. Individuals who are guided by *li* are ready to accommodate the needs of others in order to keep peace when conflict occurs. Butterton concluded that Chinese society, which is based on Confucian beliefs, depends on relationships that make connections between different types of political, social and familial roles. Weyrauch and Bell (1993) explored dispute resolution in the Gypsy culture, which has long been known for its cultural insularity and found that Gypsies do not wish to assimilate into the general population. In a related study, Gronfors (1997) described a Finnish Gypsie community and its relationship to traditional law and found that blood feuding as an attempt to resolve conflict often causes serious harm to the community. In an exploration of cultural relativism in the business world, Donaldson (1996) offered guidelines for United States business managers conducting business abroad who face ethical problems created by the cultural norms of the country to which they are assigned. Donaldson concluded that a case-by-case approach should be used to acknowledge the values of American society as well as the values of the foreign country.

In summary, provocative and significant research has been found on culture and conflict; gender and conflict; the relationship between ethnicity, race, and conflict; and

global perspectives about culture and conflict. In these studies, researchers explored the complications and challenges of resolving conflict in a diverse society. This research is important to this study because it provides a foundation for understanding the relationship between conflict and culture, which is critical to mediating conflict in urban high schools with diverse student populations.

### **Development and Implementation of Conflict Resolution Programs**

In this section, I describe studies that researchers have conducted in relation to the development and implementation of conflict resolution programs and/or related activities in public schools across the United States. These conflict resolution programs and activities are varied and include mediation, peace education, and restorative justice practices. This research is important to this study in order to understand how and why conflict resolution programs and activities are developed and implemented in a public school setting and the challenges that educators face in relation to this implementation.

In a discussion about school culture, Alfred and Bendich (2012) explored the experiences of teachers and students at a public school in Oakland, California who were trained in restorative justice practices, which direct students to take responsibility for their own behavior. Alfred and Bendich found that restorative justice practices helped students to improve their behavior in school and that, as a result of this training, the number of fights, suspensions and referrals at this school were reduced. Alfred and Bendich concluded that implementing restorative justice requires recreating American school culture in terms of how students interact with each other.

In a study about violence prevention programs in prekindergarten classrooms. Allen (2011) conducted a quasi-experimental study on the Peacemakers program in a metropolitan area in Florida, which was developed by school social service agencies. The Peacemakers program was designed to promote conflict avoidance, conflict resolution skills, and respect for other individuals. Allen's study involved 101 students in the experimental group and 60 students in the control group. Students' conflict resolution skills in both groups were assessed over a five week period. Two trained facilitators delivered the Peacemaker curriculum to the experimental group, but not to the control group, in one hour sessions. Teachers were required to be present in the classroom during these sessions. Results indicated that students who completed the Peacemakers curriculum demonstrated an increased use of conflict resolution skills and respect for others. Allen concluded that these findings provide support for the development and implementation of a preschool conflict resolution curriculum.

In an examination of teaching conflict resolution skills to middle and high school students, Graves, Frabutt, and Vigliano (2007) outlined the following four basic approaches that they believed educators in the United States use to develop and implement conflict resolution programs and activities to students: (a) a conflict resolution process skills curriculum, (b) mediation, (c) the peaceable classroom, and (d) the peaceable school. The participants for this study included 2440 middle and high school students in Guilford County, North Carolina. Graves et al. used a pre-post survey to collect data about the approaches that teachers use to teach conflict resolution skills. In relation to a conflict resolution process skills curriculum, Graves et al. found that teachers

often use this curriculum to provide instruction in problem-solving techniques, role play, and group discussion in order to help students resolve conflict. In relation to mediation, Graves et al. found that selected students are often trained as peer mediators to help resolve conflicts between disputants. In relation to the development and implementation of peaceable classrooms, Graves et al. noted that students are taught problem-solving techniques that are incorporated into the core subjects of the curriculum. In addition, they found that teachers in peaceable classrooms incorporate learning activities and teachable moments that encourage students to consider other nonviolent options to resolve conflicts. In relation to the development of peaceable schools, Graves et al. found that a comprehensive whole school approach is used that involves using conflict resolution skills for all members of the school. In these peaceable schools, students, faculty, administrators, and parents learn conflict resolution skills in order to address daily conflicts. Graves et al. also found that these programs help high school students improve their communication skills, and both middle and high school students indicated they were aware of more positive ways to handle conflict.

In another study about conflict resolution programs in public schools, Hunter (2008) examined how a culture of peace was developed and implemented in an elementary classroom. Hunter described how a first grade teacher in Redland, California created a classroom learning environment that emphasized compassion, social justice, and peacemaking. The first step that the teacher took was to equip the classroom with a round table and chairs so that students could discuss and resolve their conflicts by facing each other. Nearby, a bulletin board displayed values about the conflict resolution skills

that students learned. The teacher also trained students in specific skills related to empathy, diversity, community awareness, and conflict resolution. Occasionally, the teacher would serve as a mediator in order to help students resolve conflicts. Students used the following three step process for resolving conflict: (a) cooling down when they were upset, (b) talking about the issue when they were upset, and (c) brainstorming a win-win solution to their problem. Hunter found that students felt valued in these classroom communities and were willing to resolve their conflicts with other students. Hunter concluded that by teaching students compassion and empathy in a classroom setting, the development of a peaceful society may be possible.

Johnson and Johnson (2012) conducted a study about restorative justice practices in schools involving students from kindergarten to Grade 10 in terms of a cooperative context, constructive conflict, and civic values. In relation to a cooperative context, Johnson and Johnson found that restorative justice practices are effective when a cooperative context is developed, which involves resolving conflicts constructively while using integrative negotiations and mediation to create positive relationships. Concerning constructive conflict, Johnson and Johnson et al. found that it is critical for individuals to learn how to resolve disagreements constructively. Johnson and Johnson maintained that civic values can exist in a community when individuals share common goals, values, and commitment. In order for constructive conflict resolution to occur, however, victims must first be identified, participation in the process must be voluntary, victims must engage in safe dialogue, and a mediator must be present to provide support. In relation to civic values, Johnson and Johnson found that restorative justice practices are based on a set of

values that emphasize the importance of healing, repairing, restoring and preventing harm to each other. Johnson and Johnson et al. concluded that the benefits of teaching restorative justice practices to students includes developing a shared understanding of how conflicts should be managed.

In related research, Lane-Garon, Yergat, and Kralowec (2012) examined conflict resolution education and positive behavioral intervention support in relation to creating a climate of safety for all learners. Lane-Garon et al. noted that positive behavioral intervention support (PBIS) is a mainstream educational model for school climate improvement and that conflict resolution education (CRE) is a proven approach to school safety. PBIS emphasizes proactive instruction of desired behavioral expectations, data-driven decision making, and targeted support for students. Lane-Garon et al. conducted a case study of how these approaches were implemented in an elementary school in central California. Participants included 50 students in Grades 4, 5, and 6, who were asked to participate in both CRE and PBIS as peer mediators. These mediators were mentored by university students who wanted to become teachers, counselors, and psychologists. Lane-Garon et al. found that student involvement in CRE and PBIS increases attendance, creates a positive learning environment, helps students to peacefully resolve disputes, and decreases behavioral disruptions. Garon et al. concluded that CRE and PBIS enhances students' social and emotional development and creates a safe learning environment.

In another study about restorative justice, Pavelka (2013) examined specific practices and policies that educators used in relation to restorative justice practices. Pavelka maintained that restorative justice is a way to balance the needs of the victim



with the needs of the school community because specific consequences for those students who do wrong are administered. The three core principles of restorative justice, according to Pavelka, include repair harm, reduce risk, and empower community. Repairing harm means seeking to hold the wrongdoer accountable and to encourage the wrongdoer to make positive behavior changes. Reducing risk requires the community to practice safety procedures in order to prevent and control wrongful behaviors. Empowering the community focuses on schools and community coming together to address the wrongdoing and taking action against the wrongdoer. Pavelka found that the most popular restorative justice practice is peer mediation where students mediate conflict between two or more disputants. The focus of peer mediation is on reducing threats of violence in schools and repairing relationships among students and among students and teachers. Pavelka found that the second most popular restorative practice is peer accountability boards, which include student peers, victims and wrongdoers. These boards require the participation of students and the victim. Board members identify the impact of the offense, determine responsibility, and develop a plan that may include an apology, community service, or tutoring. Pavelka also found that conferencing is another popular restorative justice practice that focuses on the victim, the offender, family, and friends. A trained facilitator guides the discussion and seeks to repair the conflict. Another popular restorative practice is the “circles” strategy, which includes the participation of the wrongdoer and the victim, family, and relevant community members, such as law enforcement personnel, neighbors and social service staff who are all provided with an opportunity to speak out about how they were affected by the wrongful

act. Pavelka concluded that in order for restorative justice practices to be effective, the following must occur: (a) staff members must be knowledgeable about how to use specific strategies, (b) the student body needs to be invested in the program, and (c) the community needs to be supportive. Restorative justice is also dependent on a strong group of volunteers to conduct the restorative justice sessions. These volunteers can be students, parents, and other community members. Pavelka concluded that the development and implementation of a restorative justice program provides educators with the opportunity to improve school culture by addressing disciplinary standards and creating peaceful solutions to conflict.

Richards, Heathfield, and Jenson (2010) examined the effectiveness of a class-wide peer modeling intervention to improve the on-task behavior of 47 students in Grades 3, 4, 5, and 6. Students who participated in this study were enrolled in a charter school located in a city in the Western region of the United States. Richards et al. asked students to watch videos depicting modeled behavior based on Bandura's social learning theory that human behavior is learned from modeling. The peer modeling intervention included peer tutoring, social skills development, curriculum modifications, and group contingencies. Teachers and students completed questionnaires about their perceptions of student behavior in the classroom, and student behavior was observed following the peer modeling intervention. Richards et al. found that disruptive behavior distracts students from learning. They also found that modeling was a particularly effective strategy that teachers used to improve the on-task behavior of students.

In summary, these research studies related to conflict resolution in public schools indicate that a variety of types of programs and activities, including restorative justice practices, have been developed and implemented in order to resolve conflicts in a school setting. The research indicates that the use of conflict resolution programs and restorative justice practices in public schools should begin at an early age in order to teach students how to resolve conflicts in a peaceable way. Conflict resolution programs often involve different approaches, including a process skills curriculum that is used in the classroom, mediation, and the development and implementation of peaceable classrooms and peaceable schools. The success of these programs and restorative justice practices in schools depends on strong leadership, vision and empowerment among staff members, administrators, a student body that is invested in the program, and a supportive community.

### **Role of Peer Mediators in Conflict Resolution Programs**

Peer mediators have long played an important role in conflict resolution programs that have been implemented in public schools. Algert (2004) defined peer mediators as student facilitators who use a conflict resolution process to aid their peers in reconciling conflicts. The mediator does not impose solutions, assess punishment, administer judgment, decide who is right, or persuade the parties to any side of the dispute. Therefore, in this section, I present an analysis of research related to the role of peer mediators in resolving conflicts for other students that includes bullying, physical fighting, and relationship problems with peers and teachers.

Morgado and Oliviera (2010) explored peer mediation in resolving student conflicts. They noted that educators have attempted to solve conflicts among students, teachers, and administrators through disciplinary methods such as referrals and suspensions. These methods have not been successful when it comes to producing behavior changes among students. Morgado and Oliviera noted that an initiative known as Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) has recently expanded globally because local programs have demanded more effective conflict resolution strategies. Morgado and Oliviera also noted that ADR is an alternative means of dispute resolution that teaches students how to resolve their own conflicts. Morgado and Oliviera found that conflict resolution programs in schools reflect society's move away from traditional litigation in the courts to using ADR. Morgado and Oliviera also found that peer mediators help students improve their social skills, self-esteem, and empathy. Morgado and Oliviera concluded that peer mediators assume an important role in helping their peers use conflict as a source of potentially positive change and growth.

In a more recent study, Sellman (2011) examined the implementation of peer mediation services for conflict resolution in public schools in the United Kingdom. Sellman noted that peer mediation is a structured and voluntary process that provides students with an opportunity to reach an agreement that is satisfactory to both parties. For this study, Sellman selected participants from seven primary schools and two secondary schools in England. Educators in these schools were given the task of providing students with a greater voice in decision making by teaching citizenship skills that included conflict resolution skills and civic engagement. Sellman interviewed students, teachers,

lunchroom supervisors, and mediation trainers and found that the shortcomings of peer mediation were due to the failure of educators to incorporate new rules about student behavior into school operations. Sellman recommended that educators should model how to resolve conflict and concluded that a peer mediation program must be compatible with the school's vision for student empowerment.

In a discussion of potential bias in peer mediation, Wing (2009) maintained that mediation produces substantive procedural inequality when mediators do not remain neutral. In observations of the peer mediation process, Wing noted that disputants often raise questions concerning the fairness and neutrality of peer mediators. Wing noted that peer mediators frequently offer disparate opportunities for referrals based on the race of an individual and that mediation outcomes often favor white students. Wing argued that three factors are related to inequality in the peer mediation process. First, it is important for mediators to remain neutral in their role and not to choose sides. Second, inequality can occur if the mediators choose sides with disputants. Third, mediators are not responsible for imbalances of power involving societal, organizational, or interpersonal issues. Wing suggested that resolving conflicts collaboratively depends on a mediator's willingness to hear all sides. Wing defined neutrality as a condition that is necessary in order for parties to exercise their free will to negotiate solutions. In order for neutrality to occur, Wing found that peer mediators need to be impartial because the mediation process has often been criticized for not recognizing power imbalances. Wing also found that power is the key to representing and protecting the interests of all of the parties. Wing outlined four themes in reference to the role of power. First, all parties involved

must have equal access to narrating their story. Second, all parties must be aware that participants experience mediation differently. Third, bias has a negative impact on mediation. Lastly, mediation does not take into account social forces and institutional oppression. Wing concluded that inequality in mediation practices exist, and therefore, a diverse group of peer mediators are critical to the success of the peer mediation process.

In another study about peer mediation, Kacmaz (2011) explored the perspectives of primary school peer mediators on their mediation practices. This study was conducted in Bua-Izmir, Turkey. A total of 520 students in Grades 4 and 5 received conflict resolution and peer mediation training for two hours a week for 16 weeks. From that group, 12 students were selected to serve as peer mediators. These mediators were nominated by other classmates, and gender was balanced. Kacmaz conducted individual interviews with students following their peer mediation training. Kacmaz found that conflict resolution and peer mediation training directly impact students' conflict resolution skills, empathy, self-expression, and understanding. Kacmaz also found that peer mediation training encourages students to rethink the use of violence. In addition, Kacmaz found that students who are trained as peer mediators demonstrate improved behavior and improved relationships with their friends. Peer mediators also reported that mediation made them feel special by helping them to solve conflicts among their friends. Kacmaz concluded that the mediation process improves the self-esteem and confidence of peer mediators while developing their communication skills, reducing interpersonal conflicts, and improving relationship among peers.

In summary, these studies explored peer mediation as part of conflict resolution programs in public schools. Research suggested that conflict can be viewed as a source for potential positive change and growth because peer mediation offers students a peaceful way of resolving disputes as opposed to receiving punitive consequences. Peer mediation, however, will not be successful unless teachers and administrators incorporate new rules in relation to power and control into the daily operations of the school and align the peer mediation process with the school's vision. Creating the right conditions for student empowerment is also important to the success of peer mediation. In addition, peer mediators need to remain neutral during the mediation process, and they need to be selected from diverse groups of students in order to maintain that neutrality. Research also suggested that conflict resolution programs and peer mediation training positively impact students' conflict resolution skills, empathy, self-expression, and understanding skills. In addition, peer mediation is often effective in reducing out-of-school suspensions for elementary school students.

### **Effectiveness of Conflict Resolution Programs**

Even though significant studies have been conducted about the development and implementation of conflict resolution programs in public schools in the United States, limited studies have been conducted about the effectiveness of these programs. Therefore, in this section, I examine research about the effectiveness of these programs, which impacts their sustainability, in order to understand how the effectiveness of these programs impact peer mediators who participate in these programs.

In a study about a collaborative multimedia conflict resolution curriculum, Goldsworthy, Schwartz, Barab, and Landa (2006) examined the STAR (Stop, Think, Act and Reflect) curriculum. For this study, teachers developed and implemented different conflict scenarios in an online discussion format for students in Grades 5 and 6. The goal of this study was to examine if students' problem solving skills and self-efficacy improved after using the STAR program. Goldsworthy et al. collected data from multiple sources, including classroom observations, interviews, and tracking of behaviors for individual students, including their actions for solving conflicts. After participating in this curriculum, Goldsworthy et al. found that students were able to identify a conflict and suggest solutions while working in groups or pairs. They also found that students were able to identify strategies for reducing conflicts. They concluded that researchers should conduct more studies about how conflict resolution programs might incorporate interactive video technology to improve conflict resolution skills for students.

Cantrell, Savage, and Rehfuss (2007) examined the effectiveness of a conflict resolution program in reducing elementary school violence through peer mediation. Cantrell et al. examined the Peace Pal Program, which was founded on the social learning theory of Bandura who argued that children will often imitate peer responses in social situations. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Peace Pal Program after five years of implementation. The study was conducted in a K-5 elementary school with a population of 825 students. A total of 13 students were trained as peer mediators. Students ranged in age from 8 to 11 years. Teachers submitted recommendations for student mediators based on leadership qualities, good academic



standing, positive attitudes, and good character. Cantrell et al. administered a questionnaire to measure student knowledge about conflict and mediation. The most significant finding of this study was that a reduction occurred in the number of out-of-school suspensions over a five-year period as well as a reduction in both physical and verbal conflict. Cantrell et al. concluded that verbal conflicts are often solved by mediators as opposed to physical conflicts that generally lead to school suspensions.

Ttofi, Farrington, Losel, and Loeber (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies in order to explore the predictive efficiency of school bullying versus later offending. Ttofi et al. examined longitudinal studies involving 63 journals and 19 electronic databases. Ttofi et al. found that anti-bullying programs should be promoted as early interventions in public schools in order to reduce incidents of student bullying. They also found that school bullying is a risk factor for late offending and that anti-bullying programs often create safer schools and prevent crimes, therefore saving expenses in health, education, and welfare for these individuals.

In other related research, Yacco and Smith (2010) investigated multi-party conflict resolution programs at the middle school level. Yacco and Smith maintained that one of the goals of all mediation programs is to increase student understanding of multiple points of view and to improve relationships with peers. Yacco and Smith were particularly interested in examining programs that address conflicts involving three or more individuals. They found that one of these multi-party conflict resolution programs, Working Together to Resolve Conflict, helps students develop effective communication and anger management skills. Another multi-party conflict resolution program that Yacco

and Smith examined, *Teaching Students to be Peacemakers*, was created in 1960, and its goal is to help students develop cooperative relationships with each other. The 30 day training period provides students with the opportunity to learn negotiation skills and to manage conflict. Yacco and Smith found that students use abstract thinking, problem solving and cognitive skills to improve conflictual situations with peers and adults. They also found that mediation or conflict resolution programs are often not designed to effectively negotiate multiparty conflicts. They suggested that adults should conduct mediation for multiparty conflicts because these conflicts are more complex. Yacco and Smith concluded that further research is needed about how adults and students manage multiparty conflicts in order to reach a successful outcome.

In another study about the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs, Roberts, Yeomans, and Ferro-Almeida (2007) examined the evaluation of Project WIN (Working out Integrated Negotiation), a program for middle school students in an urban school district in southeast Pennsylvania. Participants included 34 middle school students in Grade 5. Students were assigned a homeroom class taught by an instructor trained in conflict resolution skills. Students were given a quiz to check for mastery of their negotiation skills following instruction, and they were interviewed at the end of their training. Roberts et al. found that, as a result of this training, 85% of these middle school students mastered conflict resolution skills, such as listening attentively, clearly expressing the needs of the disputants, and anger management. Roberts et al. also found that violent acts, such as assaults on students and teachers and the use of weapons, and

the number of arrests, suspensions, and expulsions, decreased, and students were able to implement conflict resolution skills to solve problems of their own.

Smith-Sanders and Harter (2007) examined the effectiveness of a specific conflict resolution program called Students Taking Active Responsibility (STAR), in which teachers present lessons on anger management, respect, and bullying prevention. They conducted this study at Jefferson Junior High School in the Midwestern region of the United States. The student population included 600 students in Grades 7-9. About one-fifth of the student body received free and reduced lunches. Smith-Sanders and Harter interviewed 25 students and 8 adults three days a week over a period of four months. Students reported that the STAR program enlarged their roles as citizens and learners. Students also reported that they were able to resolve difficult situations by managing tensions and reaching agreements more easily. Smith-Sanders and Harter concluded that as a result of participation in STAR, students developed self-confidence and improved relations with other students, teachers, and administrators.

In summary, this section included research about the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs in public schools in the United States. A multimedia conflict resolution program, which uses different scenarios to depict conflicts, was found to enhance students' problem solving skills, and anti-bullying programs were found to be effective as an early prevention to bullying. Research also indicated that peer mediation programs are effective in reducing school violence, including both physical and verbal conflicts. Other research suggested that middle school students benefit from participating in conflict resolution programs by improving their cognitive and problem solving skills,

but little attention has been given to multiparty conflicts. Other research indicated that conflict resolution programs are effective in reducing violence, including assaults, arrests, and suspensions, and that participation in these programs increases students' understanding of their roles as learners and citizens and in improving their relationships with other students.

### **Review of Methodologies**

For this literature review, I found 51 peer reviewed articles involving conflict or conflict resolution programs and peer mediation that used differing methodologies from case study research. I also found five studies that used case study methodology similar to this study. In the section on similar methodologies, I describe three examples of studies that used case study design similar to this proposed study. In the section on differing methodologies, I describe three examples of studies that used research designs that are different from the case study design that I used for this study.

### **Similar Methodologies**

Using an exploratory case study design, Mcloughin (2010) investigated whether or not positive outcomes might accrue in social behaviors among a group of challenged youth as part of a peer mediated service-learning project. The case in this study was an alternative high school. The participants in the study involved 26 adolescents who attended Lake Academy High School, an alternative campus located in Ohio. These students participated in a curriculum developed by the Positive Peer Group Program, which focused on academic and social skills. Students were selected to participate in the program by their teachers, based on being viewed as a positive leader, a controversial

leader, or as rejected or isolated by their peers. Students worked in heterogeneous groups involving service learning projects to improve their school. Students completed a survey that included questions related to self-discipline, work ethic, behavior, accountability, bonding to school and anger management. Mcloughin found improved student behavior, improved anger management, and bonding to the school. Mcloughin concluded that service learning projects can increase self-esteem for behaviorally challenged youth.

In another case study, Kaplan (2007) examined controversies that arose over students who wore the Confederate flag and other racial symbols at a high school in central Florida. The racial makeup of students at this high school was 90% European American and 10% African American. The National Conference for Christmas and Jesus (NCCJ) called for a conflict resolution team to intervene. The team consisted of 25 students, counselors, school psychologists, two assistant principals, and a teacher. Team members conducted dialogues involving the disputants in conflict. Ground rules for behavior were established by the students prior to the mediation. Kaplan found that the conflict resolution committee was committed to modeling behavior that would make the school safe.

Reimer (2011) conducted a case study to examine the implementation of restorative justice in an Ontario public school. Reimer collected data from multiple sources, including teacher and administrative interviews, questionnaires, and documents. Reimer interviewed four teachers and one school administrator who had knowledge regarding restorative justice practices. Reimer concluded that teachers and administration trained in restorative justice practices were most likely to use these practices on a daily

basis as opposed to teachers and administrators who were not trained. Reimer also concluded that personal commitment was not enough; a support system should be in place, including public encouragement, sustained training, and complimentary structural procedures.

### **Differing Methodologies**

Sari, Sari, and Otunc (2008) used a correlational research design to investigate the relationship between the acquisition of democratic values and the conflict resolution abilities of elementary school students. The participants included students in Grades 4, 5, 6, and 7 from Adana, Turkey. Sari et al. collected data using the *Devotion to Democratic Values Scale* and the *Conflict Resolution Ability Scale*. Sari et al. analyzed the data using mean and standard deviation distributions and independent sample t-test and correlation analysis. Sari et al. found a close relationship between students' acquisition of democratic values and their abilities to resolve conflicts.

In a meta-analysis of the literature, Thurston and Berkeley (2010) examined research on the morality and ethics of care in peaceable rural schools. They cited a study that Herzog and Pittman (1995) conducted in which participants included university students who were asked to describe their perceptions about the characteristics of peaceable rural schools. Students reported that these schools gave them a sense of community and that they were places of peace and safety. Thurston and Berkeley also examined a study by Bodine, Crawford, and Schrupf (1994), in which they concluded that peaceful societies occur when individuals exercise the rights accorded to them without being hampered by conflict, prejudice, hatred, antagonism, or injustice. Thurston

and Berkeley also noted that Noddings (1995) suggested a model for a peaceable rural school that includes a total reorganization of school curriculum. In their meta-analysis of the literature on rural schools, Thurston and Berkeley found a concern about violence and safety in American schools in general, and they suggested that alternatives to violence in schools and communities should include encouraging teachers to serve as role models and mentors who strive to develop a cohesive caring community by teaching students respect, trust, and faithfulness.

Robles-Pina and Denham (2012) conducted a mixed methods study on the role of school resource officers in bullying interventions. They noted that the number of school resource officers has increased on school campuses due to an increase in school violence. Robles-Pina and Denham also maintained that school violence in the form of bullying poses a threat to the emotional and physical health of students. For the qualitative phase of this mixed methods study, Robles-Pina and Denham collected data by conducting interviews with school resource officers. For the quantitative phase of this study, they administered *The Bully Survey* by Robles-Pina and Denhman found that school resource officers assist community members in using conflict resolution and their presence is positively linked to decreased levels of aggression among students. Robles-Pina and Denham concluded that school resource officers play an important role in developing and implementing peer support systems such as peer mediation and support interventions, even though they have limited training in bullying prevention.

In summary, the studies that I found in this literature review on conflict resolution and peer mediation that used methodologies different than case study design generally

included quantitative and mixed methods research designs. I believe that case study methodology was a good choice for this study because this design relies on multiple data sources to give a rich picture of the impact of conflict resolution programs in urban high schools on trained peer mediators.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter included a review of the literature on conflict resolution programs and peer mediation in public schools. The following topics addressed in this chapter included (a) the literature search strategy, (b) current research related to the conceptual framework based on Erikson's theory of human development and Freire's theory of the oppressed, (c) a historical perspective of conflict resolution, (d) perspectives on conflict and culture, (e) the development and implementation of conflict resolution programs in public schools, (f) the role of peer mediators in conflict resolution programs, (g) the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs, and (h) a review of similar and differing methodologies.

Several themes emerged from this review of the literature. The first theme is that conflict has been a part of human history since the beginning of time. Schinder (2007) noted that conflict is clearly evident in the early history of the Bible. Dershowitz (2000) examined biblical stories about violence and injustice and concluded that these early experiences with injustice resulted in the ten commandments and the modern day legal system. Moore (1986) noted that the early church was also seen as a key institution in mediating conflicts among individuals in Western civilization, including family disputes, criminal cases, disputes among nobles, and disagreements between countries. Moore also



noted that conflict resolution was practiced in different ways in Eastern civilizations, including such countries as Africa, Japan and China. In the early development of the United States, conflict was often addressed through physical confrontations such as dueling and war. Linder (2009) noted that in the 1960s, while the civil rights movement in the United States made headlines with leaders such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, thousands of miles away Nelson Mandela, a South African activist, eventually brought an end to apartheid in that country after a long struggle. At the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s, the development of nuclear weapons by the superpowers threatened human survival. As a result, researchers in North America and Europe saw a need to study conflict resolution, which led to research on conflict in relation to international relations, domestic politics, industrial relations, communities, families, and individuals.

The second theme that emerged from this literature review is that cultural and gender differences often lead to conflict. Chew (2001) maintained that culture shapes the ways in which individuals understand conflict. Avruch and Black (1998) noted that culture is often associated with superficial group differences. Chew also maintained that gender and conflict are related. In a discussion about the dangers of the mediation process for women, Grillo (1992) warned that dispute resolutions mandated by the courts often have disproportionate risks for women because they are skeptical of the mediation process and fearful of having contact with their spouses. Chew also maintained that conflict resolution is impacted by membership in various racial and ethnic groups. Galdin (1994) described his experiences as an African American on a college campus and found

race is a factor that challenges a person's sense of identity. Ross (1997) argued that culture itself does not cause conflict; rather, political groups motivate other individuals to follow their goals. Traore (2008) noted that conflict often arises out of misunderstandings between different groups of individuals. Triandis, McCusker, and Hui (1990) examined collectivist and individualistic cultures and found that individuals are regulated by group norms and that family is considered the most important group. In collectivist cultures, norms determine social behavior whereas in individualist cultures, attitudes determine social behavior. Higgins (1996) found that culture and religion are often used as reasons for denying women basic rights in marriage and divorce, the right to own property, and the right to be protected by criminal law. Higgins also noted that gender is a product of culture as well as of biology. Wing (2009) found a greater chance for inequality when mediators do not remain neutral in the conflict resolution process. Wing also noted that the outcomes of mediations often favor white students, particularly males.

The third theme is that conflict resolution programs are needed in public schools to reduce violence and to improve the learning climate. Alfred and Bendich (2012) found that implementing restorative justice practices in public schools will require recreating a school culture that involves rethinking and rebuilding a caring culture. Allen (2011) examined the Peacemakers program that was implemented for students in prekindergarten classrooms and found that students demonstrated an increase in the use of conflict resolution skills, avoidance skills, and respect for others as a result of their participation in this program. Graves, Frabutt, and Vigliano (2007) found that implementation of the Win-Win Resolution program in middle schools and high schools

helped students improve their communication and problem solving skills. Hunter (2008) found that students felt valued as a result of their participation in conflict resolution programs because they could discuss or resolve conflicts in a structure conducive to peaceful student interaction. Lane-Garon, Yergat, and Kralowec (2012) examined positive behavior intervention support and conflict resolution education and found that conflict resolution education enhanced student's social and emotional development and created a safe learning environment. Pavelka (2013) examined conflict resolution programs in schools that used restorative justice practices and found that reducing violence provides educators with the opportunity to improve school culture by addressing disciplinary standards and by creating peaceful solutions to conflict. Johnson and Johnson (2012) found various benefits to teaching restorative justice practices to students, which included understanding how conflict should be managed and how to develop knowledge and skills related to mediation. Richards et al. (2010) examined the effectiveness of peer modeling through the use of video and found that students who observed this video modeling improve their behavior toward other students.

The fourth theme is that peer mediators play an important role in conflict resolution programs in schools. Morgado and Oliviera (2010) found that peer mediators help students improve their social skills, self-esteem, and empathy. They also found that peer mediation offers students a peaceful way of solving disputes as opposed to receiving punitive consequences. Sellman (2011) found that peer mediation programs must be compatible with the school's vision and with maintaining a clear purpose in resolving conflict in order to be successful. Wing (2009) found that peer mediators need to remain

impartial because they have often been criticized for not recognizing and addressing power imbalances. Kacmaz (2011) found that the mediation process improves the self-esteem and confidence of peer mediators and enhances their communication skills, reducing interpersonal conflicts and improving their relationships with peers. Cantrell and Rehfus (2007) found that out-of-school suspensions in schools were reduced using peer mediation services.

The fifth theme is that research about the effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in public schools in the United States is generally positive but somewhat limited. Goldsworthy, Schwartz, Barab, and Landa (2006) examined the STAR (Stop, Think, Act and Reflect) multimedia conflict resolution curriculum to determine if students' problem solving skills improved after using the STAR program. They found that students were able to identify strategies for reducing conflicts. Cantrell et al. (2007) examined the Peace Pal program and found that this program met the goal to reduce school-wide violence and to resolve conflicts as well as teaching students long-lasting conflict resolution skills. Ttofi, Farrington, Losel, and Loeber (2011) explored anti-bullying programs as an early prevention to bullying and found that these programs create safer schools and communities. Yacco and Smith (2010) maintained that one of the goals of conflict resolution programs is to increase student understanding of various points of view and to improve relationships with peers, and yet these programs are often not designed to effectively negotiate multiparty conflicts. In an exploration of a specific conflict resolution program for middle school students that was implemented school-wide, Roberts, Yeomans, and Ferro-Almeida (2007) found that violent acts, such as

assaults on students and teachers, and the number of arrests, suspensions, and expulsions decreased. Smith-Sanders and Harter (2007) found that student participation in the STAR (Stop, Think, Act and Reflect) program increased their vocabulary, developed their roles as learners and citizens, and improved their relationships with other students.

Several research gaps surfaced in relation to this literature review. The first gap is that limited research exists on the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs and peer mediation. A second gap is that few studies have been conducted about how conflict resolution programs have impacted trained peer mediators, particularly in urban high school settings. A third gap is that limited research exists concerning the specific role of peer mediators who have been trained to resolve conflict among students in an urban high school.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacted peer mediators who were trained to resolve conflicts among their peers. A single case study research design was used to conduct this study because the boundaries between the phenomenon of conflict resolution programs and the context of an urban high school setting, particularly in relation to peer mediation, are often not clear. Case study design also supports the collection of data from multiple sources in order to present a rich picture of the phenomenon under investigation.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how an urban high school in the United States's conflict resolution program impacts trained peer mediators. In order to accomplish this purpose, I examined an urban high school conflict resolution program. I discussed how current high school students who participated as peer mediators describe their role as peer mediators at this research site. I also compared and contrasted their responses to how documents relating to the development and implementation of a conflict resolution program present the role of the experienced peer mediator. In addition, I described the beliefs of current high school students hold about the effectiveness of a conflict resolution program.

This chapter focuses on the research method for this study. It includes a description of the research design and rationale, the primary and secondary research questions, the role of the researcher, participant selection, and instrumentation. In addition, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; the data analysis plan; issues of trustworthiness; and ethical procedures are presented.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The research design for this qualitative study was a single case study. Yin (2009) defined case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are clearly evident (p. 18). Yin also noted that case study research “copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many

more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis” (p. 18). Yin argued that case study design should be used in qualitative research when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear. Yin also maintained that case study research can be used to develop a deeper understanding of a real-life phenomenon because multiple sources of data are collected and analyzed in order to provide a rich description of the phenomenon.

I selected a single case study design for this dissertation study because I wanted to explore the phenomenon of a conflict resolution program within the real-life context of an urban high school setting, particularly in relation to trained peer mediators. In order to explore this phenomenon in-depth, I collected data from multiple sources, including individual interviews with high school students who were trained as peer mediators, online reflective journals maintained by these students about their experiences as peer mediators, and documents and archival records related to a specific conflict resolution program. For this study, the case or unit of analysis was a conflict resolution program at an urban high school located in a southern state.

I considered and rejected several other qualitative research designs for this study. For example, I considered phenomenology, a research design used to understand the essence of experiences about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This design relies on in-depth interviews with up to 10 people. This design was rejected because the purpose of this study was not understand the essence of peer mediators’ experiences with conflict

resolution; instead, the purpose was to explore the impact of a specific conflict resolution program on peer mediators by collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources for each case and then comparing and contrasting the data from these sources. Grounded theory was also considered as a research design for this qualitative study. The intent of grounded theory is to generate a general theory that is grounded in the data analysis. This research design was rejected because the purpose of this study was not to generate a theory.

Ethnography was also considered as a research design for this qualitative study and rejected. Ethnography is a qualitative design in which the researcher describes shared and learned patterns of behaviors, beliefs and language of a culture (Creswell, 2007). Ethnographers explore the meaning of language and look for commonality in particular cultural groups. Ethnographers spend time talking with and observing participants in order to develop findings related to cultural themes. This research design was rejected because the purpose of this study was not to examine cultural themes but to explore how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacts trained peer mediators. As a result, I deemed the case study design to be most appropriate for my research.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question for this comparative case study was, “How does an urban high school conflict resolution program impact trained peer mediators?” The secondary research questions were:



1. How do high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program describe their role in resolving conflicts?
2. What do archival records reveal about the expected role of peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program?
3. What do high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program believe about the effectiveness of this program in helping students resolve conflicts?
4. What do archival records reveal about the effectiveness of an urban high school conflict resolution program in resolving student conflicts?

### **Role of the Researcher**

For this study, the major role that I assumed was that of a qualitative researcher who was responsible for the design of the study, the selection of the participants, the design of the instruments, the collection and analysis of data, and the dissemination of my research findings to interested individuals. Because I was the sole person responsible for data collection and analysis, the potential for researcher bias existed. In order to limit this bias, I used specific strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of this study, including reflexivity, member checks, triangulation, and adequate engagement in data collection. I describe those strategies in more detail later in this chapter.

During this study, I was employed as a high school counselor at a high school in this southern state that was not included in this study. Therefore, I had no professional relationship with any of the participants involved in this study. However, I have been trained in conflict resolution skills and currently mediate conflicts among high school students at an urban high school. In order to minimize my personal beliefs about conflict resolution programs, I maintained a journal in which I reflected on the decisions that I made during the research process in order to maintain a neutral position about the topic of this study.

### **Participant Selection**

The research population for this study was selected from one urban public high school located in one public school district in a southern U.S. state that implemented a conflict resolution program, which included peer mediation. I used a purposeful sampling technique in order to obtain the richest data possible.. The principal provided me with a list of students from each high school who had served as peer mediators in their conflict resolution program. These potential participants were determined according to the following inclusion criteria: (a) participants must be enrolled in the high school selected for this study, (b) participants must have participated in a conflict resolution program as peer mediators at the research site, (c) participants must have received training as peer mediators at the research site, and (d) participants must have parental permission to participate in this study. I planned to select the first six students who returned a signed assent and consent form to me. I selected the four potential participants who returned their signed consent forms to me.

## **Instrumentation**

For this study, I designed two instruments that I used to collect data. The first instrument was the interview protocol that I used to conduct the individual interviews with participants (Appendix E). The second instrument was an online reflective journal that I asked all participants to complete (Appendix F). I also asked an expert panel, comprised of several colleagues with advanced degrees in education, to review these instruments for their alignment with the research questions for this study (Appendix G).

### **Interview Protocol**

Merriam (2009) noted that conducting individual interviews with participants is one way to collect data in a qualitative study. Merriam also noted that interviews can be either structured, semistructured, or unstructured. For this study, I used a structured format because I predetermined the interview questions. I designed open-ended questions that began with *how*, *what*, or *why* so that participant responses to the questions were descriptive. I asked probing questions when necessary. The interview protocol included eight interview questions that addressed participation in conflict resolution programs, experiences as a peer mediator, beliefs about how to resolve conflicts, and beliefs about the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs. I also aligned these interview questions with the research questions.

### **Reflective Journal**

I also asked participants to complete an online reflective journal that included three questions that I designed. Participants were asked to reflect in writing on the impact that the conflict resolution program and peer mediation have had on their lives. I also

asked participants how they have used conflict resolution skills in their daily lives. In addition, I asked participants for suggestions to improve conflict resolution programs. I also aligned these reflective journal questions with the research questions for this study.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

In order to improve the trustworthiness of qualitative research, I followed specific procedures for the recruitment and participation of participants that are aligned with the requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University. In addition, I followed specific procedures for data collection in order to maintain the trustworthiness of the findings.

#### **Recruitment and Participation**

To recruit the participants, I first met with the Director of Program Evaluation in the public school district where I conducted this study to seek approval to collect data for this study. I explained the purpose of this study, and I asked this individual to sign a letter of cooperation as my research partner (Appendix A). Following district approval, I met with the principal at the selected high school to explain the purpose of this study and to obtain a signed letter of cooperation as my research partner (Appendix A). With the principal's approval, I asked the principal and a school counselor from the high school to provide me with the names of potential participants for this study, based on the inclusion criteria. I mailed an invitation letter to the parents of all potential participants (Appendix B), explaining the purpose of this study and asking the parents to sign and return an enclosed consent form (Appendix C). I also included an assent form for their child to sign if he or she was interested in participating in this study (Appendix D). I provided a self-

addressed stamped envelope so that parents and their child could return the consent and assent forms if they were interested in participating. From this potential pool, I selected the first four participants who returned a signed consent and assent form to me. I also contacted each participant by telephone to schedule the individual telephone interviews and to explain how I planned to collect the reflective journal data.

### **Data Collection**

I began the data collection process by conducting individual interviews with each participant. I conducted these interviews by telephone. I used a cell telephone and an audio recorder to record the interviews. Each interview was about 30 to 45 minutes in length, and I conducted all interviews during noninstructional hours in the evening when participants were at home. I wanted participants to be at ease, and therefore, I informed them that I would keep all of their responses anonymous because I would be using pseudonyms for all participants, the school, the school district, and the state. I also reminded them that the interviews would be audio recorded. At the end of the interview, I thanked participants for their support, and I reminded them that they would need to review the tentative findings of this study for their plausibility.

For the reflective journal, I explained the data collection procedures to participants at the end of the interview. I emailed participants the reflective journal questions within a few days after the interviews were completed. I asked participants to return their completed responses to me as an email attachment within one week. Once I received all responses, I sent an email thanking participants for their reflective journal data.

I collected documents from the facilitator of the conflict resolution program at the high school. The documents that I planned to collect included the original grant proposal, program evaluations, and professional development documents related to the conflict resolution program and the training of peer mediators at each high school. In addition, I planned to collect current print materials that described the conflict resolution program to students, staff, and parents.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data were analyzed at two levels for this case study. At the first level, I used the specific analytical techniques of coding and categorization to analyze the data for each source of evidence. Data were transcribed by Paradigm Reporting and Captioning, a transcription service. I provided a signed confidentiality agreement for transcribers (Appendix H). Once the data was transcribed, I uses line-by-line coding as recommended by Charmaz (2006) to construct categories for the interview and reflective journal data. I used a content analysis for the document review, which involves describing the purpose of the document, its content and organization, and its use. I also presented a summary table of the categories for each data source.

At the second level of data analysis, I used the general analytic technique of theory development to examine categorized data across all sources of data (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). As recommended by Merriam, I used the constant comparative method to describe the emerging themes and discrepant data. These themes and discrepancies formed the basis of the findings for this study, which I analyzed in relation to the research

questions and interpreted in relation to the conceptual framework and the literature review.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Merriam (2009) maintained that qualitative research must be trustworthy. This trustworthiness is based on the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability or objectivity. In the sections below, I describe these constructs and the strategies that I planned to use to improve the trustworthiness of this qualitative research.

#### **Credibility**

Merriam (2009) defined credibility as the alignment of the research findings with reality. In order to improve the credibility of qualitative research, Merriam recommended that researchers use the following strategies to improve the credibility of a study: triangulation, member checks, and peer review. Triangulation involves comparing and cross-checking data through observations that are conducted at various times and places or interview data that is collected from different individuals with different perspectives. Member checks involves asking participants to check the tentative findings of a study for their plausibility. Peer review consists of an examination of the study findings by colleagues who are qualified and knowledgeable about the topic.

For this study, I planned to use the strategy of triangulation by comparing and cross-checking interview data, reflective journal data, and documents. In addition, I planned to use the strategy of member checks by asking participants to review my interpretation of their individual responses. I also planned to use the strategy of peer

review by asking several colleagues with advanced degrees in education to scan some of the raw data and determine whether or not the tentative findings were plausible based on the data.

### **Transferability**

Merriam (2009) defined transferability as the extent to which findings of one study can be applied to other situations. In order to improve the transferability of a qualitative study, Merriam recommended that researchers use the strategies of rich, thick description and typicality of the sample. The strategy of rich, thick description refers to a detailed presentation of the setting and findings of the study. Typicality of the sample refers to the average person, situation, or phenomenon.

For this study, I planned to use the strategy of rich, thick description by providing a detailed description of the setting for this study, the participants, the data collection and data analysis procedures, and the findings. In addition, I planned to use the strategy of typicality by selecting a conflict resolution program that is typical of those types of programs used in urban high schools in this southern state.

### **Dependability**

Merriam (2009) defined dependability as the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In order to improve the dependability of qualitative research, Merriam recommended the strategies of triangulation, peer review, and an audit trail. Triangulation refers to comparing and cross-checking multiple sources of data. Peer review refers to the examination of the study findings by qualified and knowledgeable individuals. An audit trail means that the researcher maintains a research journal that includes a detailed



description of the problems, issues, and ideas encountered in data collection and the decisions that were made during data collection and analysis.

For this study, I planned to use the strategy of triangulation by comparing and cross-checking multiple forms of data. I also planned to use the strategy of peer review by asking several colleagues with advanced degrees in education who were qualified and knowledgeable about conflict resolution to review the findings of this study for their plausibility. In addition, I planned to use an audit trail by maintaining a researcher's journal in which I tracked how I collected data and how I made decisions throughout the research process.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability for qualitative research is defined as objectivity. In order to improve the objectivity of a qualitative study, Merriam recommended that researchers use the strategy of reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to “the process of reflect critically on the self as researcher” (p. 219). The researcher should explain any biases, dispositions, and assumptions that they have regarding their study in order to help the reader understand how the researcher arrived at an interpretation of data.

For this study, I planned to use the strategy of reflexivity by examining any biases and assumptions that I may have about conflict resolution programs and their effectiveness. I also planned to follow strict data collection and analysis procedures to minimize these biases. I planned to listen carefully to participants as they discussed both the positive and negative experiences they had with the conflict resolution program.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Merriam (2009) believed that being able to trust the results for qualitative research is important. When researchers conduct qualitative research, they develop findings that must be credible, transferable, dependable, and objective. Merriam also noted that qualitative research needs to be rigorously conducted so that the results are true and accurate.

To improve the trustworthiness of this study, I submitted this proposal to the Institution Review Board (IRB) at Walden University for approval to conduct research (08-12-14-0064431) I understood that I could begin the data collection process until I had obtained IRB approval for this proposal. According to IRB standards, I needed to maintain the highest integrity and confidentiality while conducting this study. Therefore, I asked all participants to sign a consent form indicating that their participation in this study was voluntary. I also kept all participant responses confidential, and I used pseudonyms for all participants, the school, and the school district. I also explained to each participant how I would collect data. An explanation of how to exit the study, if needed, was also included in the consent form.

### **Summary**

In summary, this chapter provided an overview of the research method that I used to conduct this study. A case study design was chosen for this qualitative research study because Yin maintained that case study research is used to understand real-life situations by collecting and analyzing multiple sources of evidence in order to provide a rich description of the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, this chapter included a

description of the role of the researcher, participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment and participation as well as data collection, the data analysis plan, evidence of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this single case study was to explore how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacts trained peer mediators. In order to accomplish this purpose, I described how current high school students who participated as peer mediators portrayed their role as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program. I also compared and contrasted their responses in relation to how archival records relating to the development and implementation of a conflict resolution program presented the expected role of peer mediators. In addition, I described the beliefs that current high school students hold about the effectiveness of a conflict resolution program in resolving student conflicts in comparison to fighting or arguing.

Therefore, the primary research question for this study asked, “How does an urban high school conflict resolution program impact trained peer mediators?” The secondary research questions were:

1. How do high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program describe their role in resolving conflicts?
2. What do archival records reveal about the expected role of peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program?
3. What do high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program believe about

the effectiveness of this program in helping students resolve conflicts?

4. What do archival records reveal about the effectiveness of an urban high school conflict resolution program in resolving student conflicts?

Chapter 4 includes the results of this study. In this chapter, I discuss the research setting, participant demographics, and present a review of the data collection process. In addition, I describe the data analysis process that I used in relation to each data source, present evidence of trustworthiness, and analyze the results of the study in relation to the primary and secondary research questions.

### **District and School Setting**

The research site for this study was North High School (pseudonym) in the Lincoln School District (pseudonym), which is located in the southern region of the United States. In 2014-2015, the Lincoln School District enrolled more than 24,500 students in 20 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, four alternative schools, and one early childhood education. The student demographics for the Lincoln School District that year included 52% European Americans, 24% Latino Americans, 19% African Americans, and 5% Asian American. Approximately 27% of K-12 students were classified as economically disadvantaged, and 9% were identified as needing special education services.

North High School opened to its first freshman class in the year 2000, which means that the campus is 15 years old. For the 2014-2015 school year, North High

School enrolled 2,035 students in Grades 9-12. In that year, the student body was 49.8% European Americans, 24.7% Latino Americans, 18.6% African Americans, 3.7% Asian Americans, 2.5% of two or more races, and 0.6% American Indians. Approximately 27% of students were considered economically disadvantaged because they received free or reduced lunches.

The Lincoln School District also received a positive accountability rating from the state in relation to several indices, which may have allowed educators to focus more closely on other issues, such as student leadership and behavior. Schools in the Lincoln School District were rated as *met standard*, *improvement required*, or *met alternative standard*. State accountability ratings were based on a framework of four indexes used to evaluate the performance of each public school and district in the state. In order for districts and schools to be ranked at the *met standard* rating for students in Grades 9-12, districts and schools must meet the accountability target on one of four indexes:

- Index 1: the student achievement index, which provides a snapshot of student performance across subjects;
- Index 2: the student progress index, which measures year-to-year student progress by subject and by student demographics, including race/ethnicity, special education, and English language learners;
- Index 3: the closing performance gaps index, which tracks the academic achievement of economically disadvantaged students and the lowest performing racial/ethnic student groups; and

- Index 4: Postsecondary readiness, which emphasizes the role of elementary and middle schools in preparing students to meet the demands and rigors of high school, and the importance of earning a high school diploma that provides students with the foundation necessary to be successful in college and the workforce.

The rating, *met alternative standard*, is assigned to charter schools and alternative education schools that are evaluated under alternative education accountability (AEA) provisions. Table 1 indicates the scores that North High School students received for the past 3 years based on state assessments results in the core academic areas, according to the State Department of Education.

Table 1

*State Assessment Results for North High School From 2011-2014*

Year	Subject	Grade Level	Proficiency %
2011-2012	Reading	9	86
2011-2012	Writing	9	72
2011-2012	Algebra 1	9	88
2011-2012	Science/Biology	9	98
2011-2012	World Geography	9	93
2012-2013	Reading	9	83
2012-2013	Writing	9	72
2012-2013	Algebra 1	9	87
2012-2013	Science/Biology	9	97
2012-2013	World Geography	9	90
2013-2014	Reading & Writing	9	82
2013-2014	Algebra 1	9	88
2013-2014	Science/Biology	9	98
2013-2014	U.S. History	11	98

*Note:* Adapted from the State Department of Education state assessment results for 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014.

These state assessment results indicate that most students achieved proficiency.

In 2011-2012, North High School received a *met standard* rating on the student achievement index, based on the above state assessment results. In 2012-2013, North High School also received a *met standard* rating based on the same state assessment results. However, in 2013-2014, North High School's *met standard* rating was based on slightly different state assessments results. Reading and writing assessments were combined, and a state assessment in United States history was administered, replacing the state assessment in world geography. These changes were made because reading and writing assessments had been subject to extensive public scrutiny and input from



teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, faculty and staff at southern colleges and universities, parents, and national content experts. In 2013, the governor of this southern state signed a new education law to reduce state assessment requirements for high school students because a large percentage of students struggled on several end-of-year course exams. However, Table 1 indicates that the majority of students achieved proficiency on these tests, which may be one of the reasons why educators in this school district were able to focus on other concerns, such as student leadership and positive relationships among students and teachers.

The Lincoln School District first implemented a conflict resolution program known as the Peer Leadership and Assistance (PAL) program in 2002-2003. This program is designed to provide high school students with an opportunity to mentor elementary students and special needs students in relation to resolving issues such as bullying, low achievement, at-risk youth, absenteeism, and behavior problems. The mission of the PAL program is to enable young people to use their potential in order to make a difference in their lives, schools, and communities. One of the goals of the PAL program is to build capacities and to help young people achieve school and social successes that lead to a productive life.

Participation in the PAL program is offered through two courses at North High School. PAL 1 is a course designed as a peer helping program in which selected high school students are trained to work as peer facilitators with younger students on their own campuses and/or from feeder middle and elementary schools. Participants are trained in a variety of skills that enables them to assist other students in having a more positive and

productive school experience. PAL 2 is a course designed to incorporate all the essential elements of the first year course with additional emphasis on higher-level skills, such as the training first-year students to become peer mediators, providing community service, group facilitation, and accelerated service delivery. These peer mediators also assist feeder schools in the implementation and management of conflict management teams. PAL students earn one high school credit for completing each of these courses. For the PAL 1 course, high school and middle school students are selected through an application process and instructor approval and trained to mentor students at their high school or at middle and elementary schools. In order to enroll in the PAL 2 course, students must have completed the PAL 1 course. The PAL program is offered at three high schools and five middle schools in the Lincoln School District.

In 2008, educators at North High School teamed with PaxUnited in order to provide training for peer mediators in the PAL program. PaxUnited is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization committed to providing comprehensive violence-reduction programs that incorporate conflict resolution and mediation training services for schools, parents, and community-based organizations. PaxUnited was founded in 1989 under the name PeaceMakers Unlimited, and their staff has trained educators in over 5000 schools in 28 states, as well as members of juvenile justice systems and community-based organizations, to implement conflict resolution programs using peer mediators. Their training program is designed for K-12 students. Students in Grades 3-5 receive 9 hours of peer mediation training, students in Grades 6-8 receive 12 hours of training, and students in Grades 9-12 receive 15 hours of training. Student mediators learn the necessary skills

needed to mediate conflicts among other students. Teachers, counselors, administrators and/or other student support staff at North High School and other schools in the Lincoln School District facilitate the peer mediation training.

I experienced several problems in conducting this study and selecting the setting. I initially intended to conduct research at two urban high schools located in the same public school district in this southern state where I reside and work; however, one district declined, and I needed to find another research site. Only a few districts in this southern state offer conflict resolution programs at the high school level so the search for a new research site was challenging. I contacted personnel at paxUnited to obtain information about other school districts that provided conflict resolution programs, and they sent me a list of three school districts in this southern state. Of these districts, only one of the districts granted approval for employees to participate in research studies. Lincoln School District administrators granted me approval to conduct research at both high schools, but the principal at one of the sites declined. Therefore, I received approval from IRB to change the design of this study from a multiple case study to a single case study.

### **Participant Demographics**

Participants recruited for this study were students at North High School who were enrolled in Grades 11 and 12 for the 2014-1015 school year and who had served as peer mediators in the PAL I and/or PAL 2 courses. With the principal's approval, a teacher and sponsor of the PAL program at North High School provided me with a list of 30 names of potential student participants for this study, based on the inclusion criteria that I presented in Chapter 3. All eligible students received an invitation to participate. I mailed

an invitation letter to the parents of all potential participants explaining the purpose of this study and asking the parents to sign and return an enclosed consent form to me. Their children who were interested in participating in this study were also asked to sign and return an enclosed assent form in the same envelope. I asked potential participants to mail consent forms to me within two weeks. I selected the first four participants who returned their assent and consent forms to me. All four students participants were female students: Leslie (pseudonym), Alia (pseudonym), Nancy (pseudonym), and Ceree (pseudonym). Leslie was a Grade 11 student enrolled in the PAL 1 course, and Alia, Nancy, and Ceree were Grade 12 students enrolled in the PAL 2 course.

Some problems also surfaced with the recruitment of participants. Although North High School enrolled 70 students in the PAL 1 and PAL 2 courses for 2014-2015, I was limited to the names of 30 students that the principal provided, which I believe negatively impacted the recruitment process. I mailed invitations to these 30 potential participants immediately after the winter holidays, and this timing also may have impacted student interest in this study. Only five consent forms were returned to me, and I was unable to reach one of those students because the contact number that was provided was not valid.

### **Data Collection**

For this case study, I collected data from multiple sources, including individual student interviews, student reflective journals, and documents related to the conflict resolution program. I conducted all of the individual interviews by telephone from my home during the week of February 10-17, 2015. I recorded all interviews using a digital recorder and a cell phone. I conducted the first interview with Ceree on February 18,

2015 at 5:14 p.m., which was 22 minutes in duration. On February 19, 2015 at 5:02 p.m., I conducted my second interview with Leslie, which was also 22 minutes. I interviewed Alia on February 23, 2015 at 2:28 p.m., and the interview was 26 minutes. I interviewed Nancy on February the 23, 2015 at 2:58 p.m., which was 23 minutes.

In relation to the reflective journals that these same students maintained, I emailed participants the reflective journal questions a few days after the interviews were completed. Each participant was asked to reflect on a total of three questions and to answer one question a day for 3 days. I asked participants to return their completed responses to me as an email attachment during the week of February 29, 2015. Once I received all reflective journal responses, I sent an email to participants thanking them for their reflective journal data.

In relation to the documents about the PAL program at North High School, I first collected descriptions of the PAL 1 and PAL 2 courses from the school website. I also collected documents related to the PAL program from the organizational website, which included information on training, materials, and frequently asked questions ( palusa.org, 2015). In March, 2015, I collected documents from the director of training and development at paxUnited, including a sample letter of acceptance that students received, a confirmation agreement with North High School and the program director, and a memorandum of understanding between paxUnited and the Lincoln School District. The letter of acceptance included three training dates and times for peer mediators, equipment used for training, and a diagram of rooms to be used for training purposes. The confirmation agreement included the number of students to be trained, a signature from

the agency representative, times and dates for the training, and a list of suggested equipment needed for the training sessions. The memorandum of understanding listed the agreement terms of the contract, including a background check on all employees, resource information that was provided to site personnel, and how to refer students to the conflict resolution program.

Several challenges emerged in collecting data. The first challenge was that I was unable to collect the original 2008 grant proposal because it was no longer on file. A second challenge was that paxUnited closed its doors. I contacted the director of paxUnited to determine if evaluations of the training sessions for students could be located for the Lincoln School District. I was informed that locating this data was difficult because the training documents had been placed in a storage facility. The few training documents that I did receive were given to me by the conflict resolution program facilitator at North High School.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis for this study was conducted at two levels. At the first level, I used the specific analytical techniques of coding and categorization to examine each source of evidence. I provided a signed confidentiality agreement for Paradigm Reporting and Captioning, a transcription service, giving them permission to transcribe the data (see Appendix H). Once the data was transcribed, I used line-by-line coding that Charmaz (2006) recommended for qualitative research in order to construct categories for the interview and reflective journal data. I used a content analysis for the document review,

which involved describing the purpose of the document, its content and organization, and its use. I also presented a summary table of the categories for each data source.

At the second level of data analysis, I used the general analytic technique of theory development to examine categorized data across all sources of data (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). As recommended by Merriam and Yin, I used the constant comparative method to determine emerging themes and discrepant data. These themes and discrepancies were the basis for the findings of the study, which were analyzed in relation to the research questions and interpreted in relation to the conceptual framework and the literature review.

### **Interview Data**

Interview Question 1 asked, “*How long did you participate as a peer mediator in this ..... conflict resolution program?*”

Participation as a peer mediator varied for participants. Nancy, a Grade 12 student, reported that she had only been involved in peer mediation for about six months. However, Alia, a Grade 12 student, indicated that she had been involved in peer mediation for about a year and that she also served as a peer mediator in Grade 8. Ceree, also a Grade 12 student, reported that she had been a peer mediator for the past two years at North High School. Leslie, a Grade 11 student, reported that she had served as a peer mediator for about a year. Thus, the range of time that these students participated as peer mediators was from 6 months to 2 years.

Interview Question 2 asked, “*Why did you decide to become a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?*”

The responses of Alia and Leslie to this question were similar. Both students decided to become peer mediators in this conflict resolution program to help other students solve problems. Alia noted,

I just really like helping people, and I [feel] like it's also a healthy way to solve your problems instead of arguing about it. Someone [is] there to help mediate and guide you through it. One of the things that we focus on is not saying, "Oh, you did this, you did [that]". More focusing on we need to work on this together, and not really pointing fingers. I like the fact that we can help people solve problems in a mature manner so they're not arguing in front of people.

Leslie's response to this question supported Alia's comments.

I really wanted to be a peer mediator because I thought it was really cool how you're in the program to teach others how to help other people solve problems in a more discrete kind of way and how there could be a solution to both sides of the problem.

Although Ceree and Nancy also wanted to help others, choosing to help others was not the first reason why they chose to become peer mediators. Ceree noted that she became a peer mediator because she was a member of the PAL program. Ceree added,

I'm a member of PAL, and as a PAL, everyone in the organization was trained as a peer mediator. PAL is really just about helping people and also being a good example for people. We mentor elementary students. We help with special needs kids, and last year we also became peer mediators. I decided to be a peer mediator through PAL.



Nancy reported that she became a peer mediator at North High School because of her coach who is also her conflict resolution sponsor.

Coach Nelson (pseudonym) really wanted to have everyone learn how to do [conduct mediations], because in high school we face like a lot of problems with different students and friends, so it was nice to learn how to do it and get the training. He really wanted us to apply it towards our other elementary students that we work with and other special needs [students] that we'll get to meet throughout the year, so it was really important to him that we learn how to better solve problems among other people.

Both Ceree and Nancy became peer mediators because they were influenced by their participation in the PAL program and because coach encouraged all members of this program be trained as peer mediators.

Interview Question 3 asked, “*Describe your role as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program*”?

All four mediators, Alia, Nancy, Ceree and Leslie described their role as a peer mediator differently. Alia believed a positive attitude was important to this role. Alia added:

[We start the day off] with positive things. So we focus on positivity, I guess, and the training taught us how to focus in on how the person is feeling and not really how they acted.

Leslie believed that practicing how to resolve conflicts related to real life situations in the training sessions helped her to become a more effective peer mediator. Alia also validated Leslie's response by adding,

We actually had people pretend they had conflicts, basically, and we worked through it with our trainer watching us, and he would guide us through, if we said something wrong.

Hannah also noted,

A lot of things we practiced in training was, if someone borrowed something and didn't return their jacket or cd, and breakups [ with girlfriend or boyfriend] you'll see sometimes.

Nancy also reported that an important part of the training was remaining neutral and not taking sides. Nancy commented,

Later in the week we learned how to sit [the disputants] down and kind of put yourself [in a] levelheaded [position], not on one side [and] not on the other [side] [but] make it even.

Ceree also thought it was important not to take sides in mediation to remain neutral while conducting mediations. Ceree noted, "As a peer mediator, we are always supposed to remain neutral [while trying] to find the best solution for both people." Thus, Ceree, Nancy, Alia, and Leslie believed their role as peer mediators involved maintaining a positive attitude during mediation sessions, remaining neutral during mediation sessions, and preparing for actual mediation sessions by participating in practice sessions.

Interview Question 4 asked, “ What specific strategies did you use as a peer mediator to help students resolve conflicts”?

Participants described several specific strategies that they used as peer mediators to help students resolve conflicts. Alia believed it is important to listen to both disputants’ points of view because “there are always two sides to a story.” Leslie believed that making introductions are an important part of conducting mediations. Leslie added that peer mediators need to make sure that the disputants are there for the same reason, which is to resolve the conflict. Ceree believed that remaining neutral while conducting mediations is important in order to help students resolve their conflicts. Nancy believed that it is important to find out if both parties are in agreement about the necessity for conducting a mediation. Nancy added,

I'll go talk to Person A and [the other] mediator goes and talks to Person B, and we go to their classes. We ask the [disputants] if they'd be interested in working out their problem or issue with [each other].

Alia agreed and added that getting disputants to sign an agreement is part of the mediation process. Alia noted,

[The mediators] actually write a contract, and [the disputants] sign it [if they are in agreement], and basically the contract just states what [the disputants] are going to do to make the situation okay.

Leslie also agreed with Alia that the contract was important in solving conflicts between the disputants. Leslie added,

At the end [of the mediation], once [the disputants] agree on a problem, you write [the contract] out, sign it, and then check back with the [disputants], making sure that they have followed through with their [agreement].

Thus, the strategies that participants believed were effective in their roles as peer mediators to help students resolve conflicts included making introductions and gaining permission from the disputants to conduct the mediation, listening to different points of view, and remaining neutral.

Interview Question 5 asked, " *Were you sometimes unable to help students resolve disputes? Why or why not?*"

Participants agreed that they were sometimes unable to help students resolve disputes. Alia reported that some disputes are more difficult to resolve than others. She commented,

Some of [the mediations] have been harder. If you can't come to an agreement, you schedule a follow up, so you say, 'Okay, let's think about this, and what can we do, and [then] we'll schedule a follow up'.

Leslie believed it was difficult to conduct a mediation if the peer mediator knew the disputants.

There was one time where I read the conflict, and I knew one of the people in it, so I thought it would be kind of unfair, if I [conducted the mediation], because I knew [the] story. I kind of felt it wasn't fair for me [to conduct the mediation], so I asked [Coach Nelson] to give someone else the opportunity to mediate. I didn't want it to be biased.

Nancy also refused to conduct a mediation with friends. Nancy added,

I had two friends [who] were arguing. They didn't really understand what happened. They just fell away from each other. They were in our group of friends, [and] we didn't know what was [causing the conflict]. [The disputants] both felt pretty uncomfortable with the idea of [having a mediation] with people that they knew.

Nancy also reported that disputants sometimes refused to go to mediation, adding that "I've faced times [when disputants] decided that they didn't want to go to mediation" because they were not ready and they needed to reschedule the mediation session. Ceree was the only participant who reported that all of the conflicts she mediated had been resolved. Thus, three of the four participants believed that it was difficult to conduct a mediation if you knew one or both disputants

Interview Question 6 asked, *Do you believe that this conflict resolution program was effective in resolving disputes among students? Why or why not?*

All of the participants believed that this conflict resolution program was effective in resolving disputes among students. Alia reported that she would prefer to talk to students rather than to their parents because she believed that students could relate better to each other. Alia added,

Personally, sometimes I find things easier to talk to [with] my friends than I do maybe talking to a parent or teacher. I often find that my fellow students understand each other more because we're all going through the same things.

Leslie agreed that the conflict resolution helped students solve problems. Leslie remarked,

I think that once people figured out that we actually do care and want to help other people, they start to trust [us] more, and I think it solves a lot of problems, even if people don't know it.

Nancy believed that a specific location where students could go was helpful in resolving their conflicts, even though some students may have had mixed feelings about participating in mediation sessions. Nancy added,

I think our students know that they can go to mediation, if they don't feel embarrassed to go. I think some students feel as though they are in trouble and underestimate the power of students being able to help them.

Ceree added that it was helpful to advertise mediation. She commented,

We have been trying to spread the word that we are peer mediators, and if anyone has a conflict that they need to work out, [the mediators] can help them. I think that's been helping a lot, because more and more students are finding out about [mediation].

Nancy believed that teachers also help spread the word about mediation. If teachers see a problem in class they are supposed to send an email to Coach Nelson to let him know and we will see who can go mediate for them.

Alia added,

Sometimes people just know [the name] PAL, oh, [these students] mediate. It was a video and it was mandatory and teachers had to show it

to all their classes and it made a really big impact on a lot of people.

People said it was so cool, [and it ] really impacted me. [A student from the middle school said] she was getting picked on and [the video helped her].

Leslie also added, “We [have a really good sandbox video [which includes] our kids from pre-Kindergarten.”

Thus, all of the participants believed that this conflict resolution program was effective in resolving student conflicts because, first students found it easier to talk to other students, second there was a specific place to conduct mediations, and promoting the mediation program was helpful in advertising the program.

Interview Question # 7 asked, *Describe the impact of this conflict resolution program on your role as a peer mediator.*

All four participants believed that the conflict resolution program positively impacted their roles as peer mediators because they were using the skills they had learned to resolve their own conflicts outside of school. Alia commented,

Whenever I fight with my mom now, we get through it easier. We don't fight as much because I have those skills to be like, ‘Okay, Mom, how do you feel about this?’ And then I listen to her and I ask, ‘Okay, what do I need to do to make this okay?’

Leslie reported that she helps her brothers resolve conflicts with each other. Leslie added,

I was helping solve a problem between my two older brothers. And they're like, 'Well, this happened, and I'm like, 'Oh, so how do you think this could work?' I just feel like I am [helping others without them] even knowing it.

Nancy also reported being able to resolve conflicts more effectively with her brother.

Nancy added,

[ My parents] try joke around with me and my brother; if we're ever arguing over a video game or a movie to watch, they'll always, tell me, 'Remember your mediation stuff, and remember you're supposed to be the level-headed one; you're not supposed to be arguing with your little brother'.

Ceree also referred to using her peer mediation skills to resolve conflicts with her sister.

She noted,

When my sister and I were arguing because she thinks that I took her shirt or something, and I think knowing how to solve problems and work through situations when you're upset is a valuable skill to have because [mediation] can carry over into working with your family members on issues.

Alia believed that serving as a peer mediator improved her listening skills. Alia added that mediation has helped her to understand people better because she truly listens when they talk to her. Leslie also reported that she felt happy that she could help other students solve their problems. She added,

It makes me really happy to know that I could somehow, even if I didn't know, potentially help someone or make their day or something as easy as that.



These examples show that all of the participants believed that participation as peer mediators in conflict resolution positively impacted their lives because they developed valuable mediation skills such as listening to other individuals and developing empathy for other people. They also reported using these skills outside of school to help them resolve family conflicts. The categories that I constructed from an analysis of the interview data are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

*Summary of Categories From Interview Data Analysis*


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<i>Interview Question</i>	<i>Category</i>
IQ1: Length of service	Ranging from 6 months to 2 years
IQ 2: Reasons for being a peer mediator	Wanting to help others solve conflicts Being a member of the PAL program Being inspired by a coach
IQ 3: Role as peer mediator	Starting with a positive attitude Practicing how to solve conflicts Relating mediations to real-life situations Developing skills with help of trainer Remaining neutral during mediations
IQ4: Strategies used for mediation	Making introductions Having both disputants agree to mediate Signing an agreement among disputants Listening to both points of view
IQ5: Resolving disputes	Understanding all mediations are not solved Refusing to mediate conflicts for friends Rescheduling mediations when needed
IQ6: Effectiveness of peer mediation	Believing program was effective Being able to talk to other students Helping other students Securing a particular location for mediations Advertising mediations to students Advertising mediation to teachers Recognizing PAL name
IQ7: Impact of peer mediation on their lives	Impacting lives in a positive way Developing good listening skills Solving problems outside of school Feeling good about helping others

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**Reflective Journal Data**

Journal Question 1 asked, *What suggestions do you have for improving peer mediation training?*

Suggestions for improvement varied. Alia believed that scheduling more practice mediations prior to conducting the actual sessions would be helpful because she would be better prepared to conduct mediations. Leslie suggested advertising the program so that more students could understand the purpose of mediation. Leslie also believed that selecting the right mediators could benefit the program. Leslie added:

I think I would try to make sure that the program itself gets out more and make sure that people who actually want to improve [how to manage conflict] and help people are in [the program] for that reason. It's easy to try to make yourself look good and not care about something than to actually have a passion for it.

Leslie believed that the training sessions could be more interesting so that students would not be bored. Nancy also agreed with Leslie that the conflict resolution program should be advertised. She noted,

If I were to change anything to improve peer mediation training, it would be to maybe start promoting it more. I think that it would benefit our school more if it were known better to the students to reach out and seek mediation rather than just the teachers knowing about it.

Ceree also believed that advertising would help the mediation program be more effective.

Ceree added:

I would improve peer mediation by spreading the word about it so it is more widely known. It seems to me that it would be more effective if more people were aware of it so they could use it as a resource.

Leslie, Nancy and Ceree were excited about promoting the conflict resolution program and peer mediation in particular because the program involved reaching out to the entire school.

Journal Question 2 asked, *What suggestions do you have for improving conflict resolution programs in general?*

All of the participants responded with specific suggestions for improving conflict resolution programs. Alia expressed concern about choosing the right students as peer mediators. Alia commented:

In general, I think they should [choose individuals] who want to [become] peer mediator[s] [and] make sure they are qualified to mediate properly. I also think the training process should also be at least a week.

Leslie focused again on promoting the program more widely to students, adding:

Not a lot of people are aware of the program, which is a shame because I really think it would benefit companies and schools as a whole.

Nancy wanted to involve the whole school in an effort to make all students aware of the mediation program. Nancy added:

[I] think it's hard for students to understand what a mediation is when they need one so it may be nice if the programs could do something to reach out to the

whole school and get them involved in what is being provided for them on campus.

Ceree also suggested that current resources available to them should be used more. Ceree commented:

Conflict resolution programs can be resolved by being used more often. Since we have this resource [the conflict resolution program] that has been proven to work at a high success rate, we should take advantage of it and use it when we see possible.

The consensus from all participants was that advertising the conflict resolution program is important for students and that existing resources should be used to increase awareness of the conflict resolution program.

Journal Question 3 asked, *How has this conflict resolution program and your role as a peer mediator impacted your life?*

All participants believed that their participation as peer mediators in a conflict resolution program positively impacted their lives. Alia commented:

Conflict resolution has impacted my life by helping me talk to my peers and my family in a calmer manner when we have a disagreement. It has also helped me learn to understand when I listen to people and their issues and not listen simply just to respond.

Ceree added:

Peer mediation has impacted my life by making me able to solve my own problems more effectively. Learning to stay calm and talk through the situation has benefitted me.

Leslie also reported that the skills she learned in mediation could benefit her later in life.

Leslie added that helping people was something she had always wanted to do. Nancy noted that the peer mediation skills she learned changed her internally. She commented,

I think peer mediation has made me a more patient and level-headed person. I've always tried to not pick sides, but this [mediation] program has taught me how important it is to both disputants that they feel they are in a safe environment to speak up. Being a peer mediator has helped me understand people, the way that [they] think and how to handle different situations.

Alia and Ceree both reported that serving as a peer mediator made them calmer individuals. Leslie added:

I have desire to make sure things are okay with people. All the [skills] I have learned from the program can benefit me later on in life in relationships, school, and in general.

All participants believed that serving as peer mediators in a conflict resolution program helped them develop critical life skills such as listening, self-awareness, patience, and understanding. Table 3 summarizes the categories that I constructed from the analysis of the journal data.

Table 3

*Summary of Categories from Journal Data Analysis*


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<i>Journal Question</i>	<i>Category</i>
JQ1: Improving mediation training	Scheduling more practice mediations
	Explaining program to students
	Advertising program to students
	Identifying appropriate mediators
	Making training sessions more active
JQ 2: Improving the PAL program	Choosing appropriate students as mediators
	Training more mediators
	Helping students understand mediation
	Using existing resources to make improvements
	Advertising program to students
JQ 3: Impact of the program	Remaining calm about family problems
	Helping me solve personal problems
	Improving relationships among students
	Listening to others more effectively
	Being more level-headed
	Developing life-long skills in relationships
Understanding how others think	

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**Documents**

For each of the documents, I conducted a content analysis. Merriam (2009) defined content analysis as describing the purpose, the content, structure, and use of a

document. In this section, I present a content analysis of three PAL program documents, including (a) the PAL program website, (b) the PAL program course descriptions, and (c) the peer mediator training documents.

**PAL program website.** The following information about the PAL program was available at the organization's website (wap.com, 2015): history, the PAL family, materials, frequently asked questions, resources, trainer of trainer opportunities, and how to fund this program. In relation to history, the PAL program began in 1980 as a peer helping program, combining peer assistance and peer leadership strategies that were originally developed in the late 1970s. The PAL program is one of six programs offered by the Workers Assistance Program (WAP), which is "a nonprofit resource for encouraging constructive behaviors with regard to personal wellbeing, work and academic productivity, human relationships, and community involvement" (wap.com, 2015). The WAP was founded in 1977, starting with an employee assistance program. The WAP has expanded their services to include youth advocacy and training services as well as the PAL program.

The family section on the PAL program website includes the mission of this program, which is to create better workplaces, schools, and communities. In addition, this section introduces the WAP family in relation to the following six programs: (a) the Alliance Work Partners (AWP), which offers families solution-focused counseling, guidance, training, resources and referrals to help balance individuals balance work with life to increase health and well-being, (b) the Peer Assistance and Leadership (PAL) program, which is a model program providing guidance and mentoring for peers and



younger children, (c) the State HIV Connection, which is committed to providing training related to HIV/AIDS, STDs, substance abuse prevention, and mental wellness tailored to the needs of prevention agencies serving the community, (d) Youth Advocacy (YA), which is focused on intervention services and substance abuse prevention for children and their families in urban and low-income areas, (e) Coordinated Training Services, which provides training for prevention programs and coalitions, helps to strengthen and expand prevention infrastructures, provides training with the latest prevention technology, research, and best practice approaches, and supports effective implementation of prevention programs at the local level, and (f) the Child Care and Food Program, which offers nutrition training and funding for food supplements to day care providers.

Concerning materials, the official guides for the PAL program is the teacher's manual, which is available at a cost to elementary, middle, and high school teachers who participate in the program. The teacher's manual provides program sponsors and teachers with step-by-step guidance in relation to program orientation, recruitment and selection, student training, supervision, evaluation, and maintenance. The student training section contains a State Department of Education approved curriculum that includes the following nine essential knowledge and skills that peer mediators are expected to learn:

(1) **Group building skills:** the student is taught to understand the importance of the group dynamic and how to maintain a good working relationship with peers. The student is expected to:

- a. Contribute to the establishment of norms regarding conduct within the group
- b. Maintain confidentiality and trust of other members
- c. Participate willingly in group activities

- d. Be inclusive and encourage other group members to participate in activities, making them feel valued and appreciated
- e. Keep a positive, open attitude and express support and acceptance of others
- f. Use constructive techniques in resolving conflict

(2) **Leadership skills:** the student is learns how to take ownership of their PAL® class and within their campus. The student is expected to:

- a. Take initiative in activities and within their relationships with peers
- b. Be responsible, understanding that they are role models, make good decisions
- c. Keep everyone on track in discussion and act as a resource to the students they mentor and to the campus as a whole
- d. Model a healthy lifestyle
- e. Change the idea of peer pressure to mean something positive, encourage peers to do the best they can and make good decisions
- f. Recognize behavior that indicates trouble or concern and refer to appropriate place
- g. Initiate and maintain friendly relationship with persons not necessarily in their social group

(3) **Communication techniques:** the student learns how to communicate in a way that facilitates discussion, trust and open lines of communication. The student is expected to:

- a. Understand the basic principles of verbal and nonverbal communication
- b. Articulate their ideas, feelings, and intentions clearly
- c. Use active listening skills (i.e. attending, empathizing)
- d. Respond in a facilitative way (i. e. questioning, clarifying, summarizing)
- e. Communicate in a diverse situation (i.e. meeting new students, conversing with students from different countries and cultures)
- f. Restrict judgment and maintain confidentiality
- g. Welcome constructive feedback

(4) **Problem solving/decision-making skills:** the student is taught to take a conflict apart and solve it in steps, be conscientious of alternative opinions, and be sure not to alienate members of the group. The student is expected to:

- a. Identify problems, defining controversies as problem-solving situations in which differences need to be clarified
- b. Brainstorm alternatives and be critical of ideas, focusing on the problem and not the person
- c. Take the point of view or perspective of other members to understand and consider alternatives to their position
- c. Predict consequences
- d. Carry out action plans
- e. Evaluate results

(5) ***Self-awareness/self-esteem skills***: In order to model good behavior, a student must understand who they are as individuals, and be able to foster a positive self-concept. This helps them refuse negative influence and make healthy decisions. The student is expected to:

- a. Live and demonstrate appropriate characteristics and skills
- b. Be proud of good choices, show peers that he or she can still have fun and be drug free
- c. Understand the importance of self-worth
- d. Be willing to improve and take suggestions
- e. Make good choices, even if it means standing alone
- f. Initiate and maintain friendly relationship with persons not necessarily in his or her social group

(6) ***Risk and protective factors***: increasing the student's involvement in the school, helps to foster and create relationships, increases the student's resources within the community and makes the school and community environment more positive. The student is expected to:

- a. Help assess community needs and become more involved where appropriate
- b. Be willing to work outside of his or her comfort zones
- c. Know how to say no to negative peer pressure

(7) ***Cultural competency***: Peers adopt an outreach approach, making contact with other students they do not know, who may be different from them, to offer assistance. The student is expected to:

- a. Take initiative in making new students feel comfortable
- b. Keep an open mind and try to understand different perspectives
- c. Understand that all people are different, appreciate those differences, and understand the similarities
- d. Be aware of prejudices and withhold judgment
- e. Make all people feel comfortable sharing their ideas and perspectives

(8) ***Service learning***: assessing community needs and student strengths. Matching up skills and becoming more invested in the school and community. The student is expected to:

- a. Assess needs in the community and apply skills where possible
- b. Participate actively in the community
- c. Know what the resources are within the community and be able to refer people to those resources
- d. Model healthy life choices
- e. Encourage peers to make healthy choices

(9) ***Knowledge of prevention issues***: Students learn the risks associated with substance abuse and learn to recognize the early warning signs. The student is expected to:

- a. Maintain confidentiality unless sharing puts them or others in danger
- b. Know the referral resources within the school and community in case they are needed
- c. Have refusal skills and know how to teach others how to use them
- d. Model a healthy and appropriate lifestyle
- e. Understand the risks involved with substance abuse

The teacher's manual is designed to meet the needs of educators who coordinate the PAL program and includes instructions, worksheets, sample forms, and many activities to use with students. All PAL program teachers must purchase a material packet, which includes a teacher's manual and a student handbook for a total cost of \$160.

The FAQ section of the PAL program website includes frequently asked questions about registration, teaching, training, and benefits of the program. Some examples of frequently asked questions include the following:

1. I am unfamiliar with PAL. What are the benefits of PAL to my students and community?
2. My school is interested in implementing PAL? How do we do this?
3. We just implemented PAL at my school. What is next?
4. Why do I need to get trained in PAL to teach it?
5. How long are adult trainings and what are the fees associated with them?
6. How do I register for a training?
7. What are the benefits of student trainings and what are the costs associated with them?
8. What materials do I need to implement PAL?
9. What is the difference between a conference and training?

## 10. How do I register for a conference?

The resources section of the PAL program website includes a list of websites that PAL program teachers could use as resources. These websites include the National Association of Peer Program Professionals, the Search Institute, the Generator School Network, Stop Bullying, and Taking It Global. These websites provide information about how to select and recruit students for the PAL program, student training information, and information about how to help students develop specific conflict resolution skills, including listening, paraphrasing, decision-making, developing relationships, and identifying bullying behavior.

The section about the trainer of trainer programs on the PAL program website includes upcoming opportunities to become a trainer of trainers in the PAL program for currently certified teachers. One benefit in becoming a trainer of trainers is that PAL program teachers can join the network of certified trainers to assist new PAL program teachers. The eligibility criteria for becoming a trainer of trainers includes the following: (a) 3 years experience as a PAL program teacher and/or trainer or 4 years experience as a teacher and/or trainer of another school-based peer helping program; and (b) 2 years experience as a PAL program training specialist or equivalent. During the certification process, the prospective PAL program teacher trainer must complete the following in 2 years: (a) application, (b) orientation and development, (c) observation of one initial adult training session conducted by a PAL program trainer, (d) facilitation of several activities at one PAL initial adult training session conducted by a PAL program certified trainer,

(e) conference experience, and (f) completion. After completing these steps, receiving final approval and endorsement from PAL program staff, and signing a contractual agreement, the prospective PAL adjunct adult trainer is issued an official certificate.

The section on how to fund the PAL program on this website includes information about how educators at certified PAL schools may share the cost of student training with other schools and school districts. For instance, educators at one school or school district could host student training at their location, so that students from other school districts could participate, and they all split the fees. Fundraisers, school activity funds, and corporate sponsorships are other methods that educators could use to cover the registration and travel costs for conferences and student training. Schools may also be eligible for federal funding such as Part A: Federal and State Compensatory Education, NCLB Title I Stimulus, or NCLB Title IV, Part A: Safe and Drug-Free Schools.

Table 4 below is a summary of the categories that I constructed for the PAL program documents.

Table 4

*Summary of Categories for PAL Program Website*

<i>Website Components</i>	<i>Categories</i>
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beginning as employee assistance program in 1977</li> <li>Starting peer mediation training in 1980</li> <li>Expanding services</li> </ul>
Meet the Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a partnership with community organizations</li> <li>Partnering with Alliance Work Partners</li> <li>Partnering with Peer Assistance Leadership</li> <li>Partnering with State HIV Connection</li> <li>Partnering with Youth Advocacy</li> <li>Partnering with Coordinated Training Services</li> <li>Partnering with Child Care Food Program</li> </ul>
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing teacher manual</li> <li>Providing student manual</li> <li>Learning group building skills</li> <li>Learning leadership skills</li> <li>Learning communication techniques</li> <li>Learning problem solving/decision making skills</li> <li>Learning self-awareness/ esteem skills</li> <li>Understanding risk and protective factors</li> <li>Learning cultural competency skills</li> <li>Providing service learning opportunities</li> <li>Providing knowledge about prevention issues</li> </ul>
Frequently Asked Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asking about benefits</li> </ul>

	Asking about training information
	Asking about resources for troubled youth
	Asking about building relationships
	Asking about resisting negative influence
	Asking about networking opportunities
	Asking about technical assistance
Resources	Providing National Association of Peer Programs
	Providing Search Institute
	Providing Generator School Network
	Providing Stop Bullying
	Providing Taking It Global
	Providing State Department of Education
	Providing Youth Service America
	Providing Global Youth Service Day
	Providing Federal Student Aid
Trainer of Trainers	Listing upcoming training events
	Using certified PAL leaders
	Training incoming teachers
	Explaining certification process
Funding	Sharing costs of student training
	Holding fundraising activities
	Receiving funds from government agencies
	Offering scholarships
	Reducing registration fees

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**PAL program courses.** According to the 2014-2015 *North High School Course Catalog*, the PALS I program course is described as follows:

PALS I (Peer Assistance and Leadership) is implemented as a peer-helping program in which selected high school students are trained to work as peer facilitators with younger students on their own campuses and/or from feeder middle and elementary schools. Participants are trained in a variety of helping skills that enables them to assist other students in having a more positive and productive school experience. The course serves the dual purposes of providing practical knowledge and skills, as well as actual field experience for students potentially interested in careers in education or other service professions. PALS use positive peer influence as a central strategy for addressing dropouts, substance abuse prevention, teen pregnancy and suicide, absenteeism and other areas of concern.

According to the 2014-2015 *North High School Course Catalog*, the PALS II course is described as follows:

[It] incorporates all the essential elements of the first-year class with emphasis on higher-level projects and skills, such as assistance with training of first-year peer helpers, peer mediation and conflict resolution, community service, group facilitation, and accelerated service delivery. These peer helpers will assist feeder schools in the implementation and management of conflict management teams.

Students who enroll in these courses earn 1.0 high school credit for each course. Table 5 below is a summary of the categories related to the course descriptions.

Table 5

*North High School PAL I and PAL II Course Descriptions for 2014-2015*


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<i>Course</i>	<i>Categories</i>
PAL I	Training as peer facilitators Training in a variety of skills to help other students Providing practical knowledge/skills Providing field experience in education/service Using peer influence to address student conflicts Addressing the needs of dropouts Addressing substance abuse Addressing teen pregnancy Addressing absenteeism
PAL II	Emphasizing higher-level skills Assisting in training of PAL I students Assisting in mediation and conflict resolution Assisting in community service Assisting in group facilitation Assisting conflict management teams

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**Peer mediation training documents.** I collected the following documents about the agreement between the Lincoln School District and paxUnited in relation to the training of peer mediators for the PAL program: (a) confirmation agreement, (b) letter of acceptance, (c) partner agreement, and (d) mediation training outline and (e) the training curriculum.

The confirmation agreement included a list of dates for the peer mediation training of students from North High School during 2014-2015. The training sessions were to be held on July 14-16, 2014 between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. at North High School. Thirty students were expected to attend this training session. The confirmation agreement also indicated that North High School educators should provide the equipment for these training sessions, including a video cassette recorder and monitor, whiteboard with markers, pens and pencils, student's workbooks, markers, a cassette player, masking tape, nametags, and a flip chart and easel.

The letter of acceptance was a document from the director of training and development for paxUnited to a representative from North High School. The director confirmed the dates and times of the three day training session and explained that the fees for these sessions would be covered by the Department of State Health Services and the Criminal Justice Division of the Governor's Office. In addition, the director stated that students selected for this peer mediation training should be committed to attending all sessions. Staff at North High School were asked to provide two breaks and a lunch period for students during these training sessions. In addition, the director of training and development at paxUnited required educators at North High School to provide the names of all participating students prior to the training sessions. The letter also included a diagram of how the room should be set up for the training sessions.

The partner agreement document required signatures from the principal and the PAL program coordinator at North High School and the director of training and development at paxUnited in order to affirm specific principles in connection with being

a Criminal Justice Department grant recipient for the Peers Making Peace Mediation Program, which is the title of the training program that paxUnited offers. These principles included the following: (a) key district and campus administrators must support this training and its goals, (b) the district and school must provide effective campus-level coordination and support for this program, (c) program implementation should be conducted in a manner consistent with the principles of effectiveness, as outlined by the Federal Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act and Criminal Justice Division grant specifications, (d) the school district must agree to purchase a site license of \$150.00 per academic level, which includes 30 student workbooks per level, (e) each recipient must supply specific equipment and supplies, (f) a PAL program coordinator must be selected who demonstrates high levels of trust and rapport with students, receives assistance from others in campus planning, attends a 3-day certification workshop conducted by paxUnited, uses approved training materials, and is present at all times during the student training sessions, (g) mediation students must be selected who are characterized as having high levels of trust among their students and are ready to assist them, constitute representation of the student body, are provided with high quality training and supervision, and evidence a high level of ownership and responsibility for the program, and (h) a school district commitment to four years of program implementation.

The mediation training outline included a description of activities for the 3 days of peer mediation training. Day 1 included activities such as getting to know each other, watching a videotape on violence, building a conflict wall, and understanding the role of

the peer mediator and the ways and means of mediation. Students were also involved in demonstrations and practice in relation to the rules of mediation, storytelling, getting to the bottom of things, and listening for feelings. Day 2 included an emphasis on teamwork, active listening, establishing neutrality, and understanding all points of view. Students were also involved in demonstrations and practice in relation to needs and solutions, making good agreements, and reaching closure. Day 3 included an emphasis on dealing with anger and difficult disputants and implementation issues related to the mediation process.

Table 6 below is a summary of the categories that I constructed for the peer mediation training documents.

Table 6

## Summary of Categories Related to Peer Mediation Training Documents

<i>Component</i>	<i>Category</i>
Confirmation agreement	Stipulating training dates and times for students Stipulating training location and directions to site Requiring list of students to be trained Noting required equipment
Letter of acceptance	Confirming training dates and times for students Explaining how fees will be covered Requiring coordinator to be present at all sessions Requiring students to attend all sessions Requiring specific equipment for all sessions Explaining room setup
Partner Agreement	Requiring administrative support Requiring implementation consistent with grant Requiring a site license Selecting coordinator based on specific criteria Selecting students based on specific criteria Requiring 4-year commitment to implementation
Mediation training: Day 1	Getting to know each other Building a conflict wall Understanding role of mediator Understanding ways and means of mediation Practicing rules of mediation
Mediation training: Day 2	Practicing storytelling and listening for feelings Learning teamwork Learning to actively listen Understanding how to address needs and solutions Learning neutrality Learning how to make good agreements Practicing agreements and closure
Mediation training: Day 3	Learning how to consider all points of view Learning how to deal with anger Practicing how to deal with angry disputants Discussing mediation implementation issues

### **Emerging Themes**

Seven themes emerged from the construction of categories related to each data source. These themes inform the key findings for this study that I will analyze in the results section in relation to the primary and secondary research questions.

*Theme 1:* Participants described their role in resolving conflicts as maintaining a positive attitude, remaining neutral when mediating conflicts for their peers and practicing real-life situations relating to high school experiences while learning to resolve conflicts.

*Theme 2:* PAL program documents revealed that peer mediators were expected to learn conflict resolution skills such as group building skills, leadership skills, communication techniques, problem solving and decision-making skills, self-awareness and self-esteem skills, understanding risk and protective factors, cultural competency skills, understanding service learning opportunities, and understanding preventive issues related to conflict. Descriptions of PAL I and PAL II courses training documents also revealed specific skills that peer mediators were expected to learn.

*Theme 3:* Participants believed that the PAL program was effective in resolving disputes among students because students preferred to talk to their peers than to parents or teachers and students learned to trust them and confide in them; in addition, participants believed the PAL program was effective because a specific location was provided for mediation and the program was advertised to students and staff as an important resource.

*Theme 4:* No archival records or documents were found that provided evidence of the effectiveness of the PAL program.

*Theme 5:* The PAL program positively impacted trained peer mediators because participants believed that this program helped them to fulfill their desire to help their peers resolve conflicts.

*Theme 6:* The PAL program positively impacted trained peer mediators because they reported using the conflict resolution skills they had learned to resolve personal conflicts with friends and family members outside of school.

*Theme 7:* The PAL program positively impacted trained peer mediators by helping them develop critical life skills such as active listening, self-awareness, patience, and understanding.

### **Discrepant Data**

Yin (2014) defined discrepant data as data that does not align with the theoretical propositions or the research questions of a case study. Discrepant data may also result in alternative theoretical propositions that could be considered for future research. The primary research question for this study explored how a high school conflict resolution program impacted trained peer mediators. The theoretical proposition that guided this study was that the high school conflict resolution program, which for this study was the PAL program, positively impacted trained peer mediators. Data analysis supported this theoretical proposition. No data emerged that indicated the PAL program negatively impacted peer mediators.



### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

During data collection and data analysis, I used several strategies to improve the trustworthiness of this qualitative research. These strategies were related to the constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the paragraphs below, I described how I used those strategies.

#### **Credibility**

To improve the credibility of this case study, I used several strategies that Merriam (2009) recommended for improving the credibility of qualitative research. I used the strategy of triangulation by comparing and cross-checking data from the interview and journal responses, which I implemented at various times from different individuals with different perspectives about conflict resolution. I used the strategy of member checks by asking participants to review the tentative findings of this study for their plausibility. I also used the strategy of peer review by asking several colleagues with advanced degrees in education to scan the tentative findings of this study to determine if they were credible based on the data.

#### **Transferability**

In order to improve the transferability of a qualitative study, Merriam recommended that researchers use the strategies of rich, thick description and typicality of the sample. For this study, I used the strategy of rich, thick description by providing a detailed description of the setting for this study, the participants, and the data collection and data analysis procedures. I also used the strategy of typicality of the sample by

selecting a public school district that had implemented a model conflict resolution program that had been replicated in many other school districts in the United States.

### **Dependability**

Merriam (2009) recommended that to improve the dependability of qualitative research, the researcher should use the strategies of triangulation, peer review, and an audit trail. I used triangulation by comparing and contrasting multiple sources of data and peer review by seeking feedback from educational colleagues about the plausibility of the findings of this study. I also conducted an audit trail by keeping a journal of the decisions that I made during the research process.

### **Confirmability**

For this study, I used the strategy of reflexivity that Merriam (2009) recommended by examining any biases and assumptions that I had about conflict resolution programs and their effectiveness. Because I am currently employed as a counselor at a large urban high school in a southern state, I have been trained in conflict resolution strategies. Therefore, I minimized my beliefs about conflict resolution training and relied instead on the data that I collected. In addition, I followed strict guidelines concerning data collection and analysis procedures to minimize these biases. I also listened carefully to participants as they discussed the experiences they had with the PAL program, trying not to judge their experiences.

## **Results**

The results for this study are informed by the categories that I constructed for each data source and by the themes that emerged from the data analysis. I present the

results for the secondary research questions first because the results for the primary research question reflect a synthesis of the findings for the secondary research questions.

Related Research Question 1 asked, *How do high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program describe their role in resolving conflicts?*

The key finding for this research question was that participants believed their role as peer mediators involved maintaining a positive attitude during mediation sessions, remaining neutral during mediation sessions, and preparing for actual mediation sessions by participating in practice sessions.

Interview data supported this finding. All students reported that maintaining a positive attitude during mediation sessions was important because they wanted to be role models for other students in showing them how to resolve disputes and to focus on the positive outcomes of the mediation. Students also reported that remaining neutral helped disputants find the best solution(s) to resolving the conflict. In addition, participants believed that preparing for mediation sessions was important in helping disputants reach an agreement. Participants believed that learning how to introduce themselves to the disputants and learning how to explain their role as mediators were critical factors in helping disputants to trust them.

Reflective journal data also supported this finding because participants wrote that students who are selected as peer mediators need to have a passion for the program and they need to be trained properly. Participants also wanted training so that they would be

better prepared to mediate conflicts among their peers. Participants also believed that conducting mediation sessions with friends would make it difficult to remain neutral.

Related Research Question 2 asked, *What do archival records reveal about the expected role of peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program?*

The key finding for this question was that the PAL program website revealed specific expectations for trained peer mediators, including learning group building skills, leadership skills, communication techniques, problem solving and decision making skills, self-awareness and self-esteem skills, understanding risk and protective factors, cultural competency skills, awareness of service learning opportunities, and gaining knowledge of preventive issues.

Descriptions for the PAL I and PAL II courses also included expectations for the role of the peer mediators in the PAL program. The PAL I course description indicated that students were expected to work as peer facilitators with younger students on their own campuses and/or feeder middle and elementary schools. Participants were trained in a variety of skills that enabled them to assist other students in having a more positive and productive school experience. The description for the PAL II course also indicated that students were expected to develop higher-level skills, such as training first-year students to become peer mediators, providing community service, group facilitation, and accelerated service delivery. These peer mediators were also expected to assist feeder schools in the implementation and management of conflict management teams.

Peer mediation training documents also revealed specific expectations for peer mediators. In terms of selecting students for peer mediation training, the paxUnited

partners agreement stipulated that selected students should be characterized by having high levels of trust among their peers and be ready to assist them. In addition, these selected peer mediators should constitute a representative cross-section of the student body and should demonstrate a high level of ownership and responsibility in relation to the program. In Day 1 of a three day required training session, peer training documents indicated that students were expected to learn how to get to know each other, to understand the role of the mediator, to understand the ways and means of mediation, to practice the rules of mediation, to practice storytelling, and to actively listen for feelings. In Day 2, students were expected to learn how to mediate conflicts that included learning teamwork, learning how to actively listen, understanding how to address needs and solutions, learning neutrality, learning how to make good agreements, practicing agreements and closure, and learning how to consider all points of view. In Day 3, students were expected to learn how to deal with anger, how to deal with angry disputants, and to discuss issues related to the implementation of the mediation process.

Related Research Question 3 asked, *What do high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program believe about the effectiveness of this program in helping students resolve conflicts?*

The key finding for this research question was that participants believed that this conflict resolution program was effective in resolving student conflicts because students found it easier to talk to other students than to parents and teachers because they learned to trust and confide in peer mediators. In addition, participants believed that the PAL program was effective because a specific location was provided for the mediation

sessions and the program was advertised to students and staff as an important resource in resolving conflict.

Interview data and reflective journal data supported this finding. Participants believed that disputants trusted them because they had developed some skills in building positive relationships with their peers. Participants also believed that disputants talked to other students more easily than to their teachers or parents because participants had experienced some of the same conflicts as disputants, including breakups with boyfriends or girlfriends and not returning a borrowed item. Participants also believed that the PAL program was effective because school administrators had provided a conference room located in the front office area as a private and safe place to conduct mediations. These mediations were supervised by the PAL program coordinator and school administrators. Participants also reported that some students participated in the making of a commercial, which included students from pre-kindergarten, about bullying that occurs in a sandbox. PAL students presented these commercials to teachers and students at North High School and at feeder schools to create awareness of the daily conflicts that students of all ages face and to present the PAL program as an effective resource in resolving conflict.

Related Research Question 4 asked, *What do archival records reveal about the effectiveness of an urban high school conflict resolution program in resolving student conflicts?*

The key finding for this research question was that I did not find any archival records that presented evidence of the effectiveness of the PAL program in resolving student conflicts.

The archival data that I sought were evaluations of the PAL program, but I was unable to collect any written evidence of the effectiveness of this program in resolving student conflicts. In addition, I sought to collect evaluations of the peer mediation training sessions. However, I was unable to collect this archival data because paxUnited had stopped providing consultation services to school districts, and the director of training and development at paxUnited informed me that locating this data was difficult because training documents had been placed in a storage facility. The few training documents that I did receive were given to me by the conflict resolution program facilitator at North High School, but these documents were not evaluative.

The central research question asked, *How does an urban high school conflict resolution program impact trained peer mediators?*

The key finding for the central research question was that the conflict resolution program *positively* impacted trained peer mediators because they believed they were able to fulfill their desire to help their peers resolve conflicts, and they were able to use the skills they had learned to resolve their personal conflicts outside of school with family members and friends. In addition, participants believed that the PAL program positively impacted their lives because they developed valuable mediation skills, such as listening to other individuals, developing empathy for other people, patience, and learning to remain neutral, which they could transfer to other situations. No negative impact of the PAL program on the peer mediators was found.

Interview data and reflective journal data supported this finding. All participants commented on the positive impact of the PAL program on their lives. Alia believed that

the peer mediation training sessions, in particular, provided her with skills that helped her to remain calm in resolving conflicts at home. Alia added,

Whenever I fight with my mom now, we get through it easier. We don't fight as much because I have those skills to be like, 'Okay, Mom, how do you feel about this?' And then I listen to her, and I ask, 'What do I need to do to make this okay?'

Nancy also believed that serving as a peer mediator for the PAL program had positively impacted her life at home because she was able to resolve conflicts with her brother more effectively and to model these mediation skills for her parents. Nancy added,

[ My parents] try joke around with me and my brother; if we're ever arguing over a video game or a movie to watch, they'll always, tell me, 'Remember your mediation stuff, and remember you're supposed to be the level-headed one; you're not supposed to be arguing with your little brother'.

Leslie also reported that helping other students solve their problems made her feel good. Leslie added, "It makes me really happy to know that I could somehow potentially help someone or make their day or something as easy as that." Participants also commented that participation in the PAL program helped them to improve relationships among students and to develop life-long skills in building these relationships. Ceree noted, "As a peer mediator, we are always supposed to remain neutral [while trying] to find the best solution for both people." In her reflective journal, Leslie wrote, "All the [skills] I have learned from the program can benefit me later on in life in relationships, school, and in general." Alia added,



Conflict resolution has impacted my life by helping me talk to my peers and my family in a calmer manner when we have a disagreement. It has also helped me learn to understand when I listen to people and their issues and not listen simply just to respond.

Thus, participants in this study believed that the PAL program had a positive impact on them because they were able to resolve real-life conflicts among their peers by developing active listening skills and learning how to remain neutral. Supporting documents also revealed that peer mediators received extensive training as peer mediators, which may have helped them develop these life-long conflict resolution skills.

Table 7 includes the key findings in relation to the related and central research questions for this study.

Table 7

*Key Findings for Central and Related Research Questions*

<i>Research Question</i>	<i>Findings</i>
RRQ1: Actual role of peer mediator	Maintaining a positive attitude Practicing how to resolve conflicts Learning how to remain neutral
RRQ2: Expected role of peer mediators	Learning group building skills Learning leadership skills Learning communication techniques Learning problem solving/decision skills Learning self-awareness skills Understanding risk and protective factors Learning cultural competency skills Understanding service learning opportunities Learning preventative issues Working as facilitators Assisting other students Providing community service Having a positive school experience
RRQ3: PAL program effectiveness: peer mediation	Solving disputes Finding it easier to talk to students Learning to trust each other Learning to care about other students Having a specific location for mediation Advertising the program to improve teacher and student awareness
RRQ4: PAL program effectiveness: archival records	None found
Central RQ: Impact of PAL program	Helping peers to resolve conflicts Resolving personal conflicts Improving listening skills Developing empathy for others Becoming more patient Learning how to remain neutral

### **Summary**

This chapter included the results of the study. In this chapter, I described the setting of the research site, which was a large urban high school in a southern state. I also described the participants who were students enrolled in Grades 11 and 12 for the 2014-2015 school year and who served as peer mediators in the PAL I and/or PAL 2 courses. In addition, I reviewed the data collection procedures that I followed in relation to individual student interviews, student reflective journals, and documents about the conflict resolution program. In terms of data analysis, at the first level, I used the specific analytical techniques of coding and categorization to examine each source of evidence. Following the data transcription, I used line-by-line coding that Charmaz (2006) recommended for qualitative research in order to construct categories for the interview and reflective journal data. I used a content analysis for the document review, which involved describing the purpose of the document, its content and organization, and its use. I also presented a summary table of the categories for each data source. In addition, I presented evidence of strategies that were used to improve the credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of this qualitative research. Finally, I presented an analysis of the results or findings in relation to the central and related research questions for this study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this single case study was to explore how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacted trained peer mediators. I selected a single case study as the research design because I wanted to explore the phenomenon of a conflict resolution program within the real-life context of an urban high school setting, particularly in relation to trained peer mediators. In order to explore this phenomenon in-depth, I collected data from multiple sources, including individual interviews with high school students who were trained as peer mediators, online reflective journals maintained by these students about their experiences as peer mediators, and documents and archival records related to urban high school conflict resolution programs. This study was designed to address a research gap created by the limited extant qualitative research on conflict resolution programs in urban public schools, particularly in relation to the impact of these programs on trained peer mediators.

This chapter includes discussions, recommendations and implications related to this study. In this chapter, I present a summary of the findings and then interpret these findings in relation to the conceptual framework and the literature review for this study. In addition, I discuss the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research. I also discuss how this study will contribute to positive social change.

### **Summary of Findings**

In Chapter 4, I presented the key findings for this study in relation to the central and related research questions. Concerning related research question #1, which

investigated how participants described their role in resolving conflicts, the key finding was that participants believed their role as peer mediators involved maintaining a positive attitude during mediation sessions, remaining neutral during mediation sessions, and preparing for actual mediation sessions by participating in practice sessions.

The key finding for related research question #2, which investigated what documents revealed about the expected role of peer mediators, was that the PAL program website revealed specific expectations for trained peer mediators, including learning group building skills, leadership skills, communication techniques, problem solving and decision making skills, self-awareness and self-esteem skills, understanding risk and protective factors, cultural competency skills, awareness of service learning opportunities, and gaining knowledge of preventive issues. PAL program courses and peer mediation training documents also revealed specific expectations for students. In terms of selecting students for peer mediation training, the training agreement stipulated that students should be characterized by high levels of trust among their students and be ready to assist them. In addition, these students should constitute a representative cross-section of the student body and should demonstrate a high level of ownership and responsibility in relation to the program.

The key finding for the third related research question, which concerned participant beliefs about the effectiveness of the PAL program, was that participants believed that the PAL program was effective in resolving student conflicts. The participants stated that this was because students found it easier to talk to other students than to parents and teachers and because they learned to trust and confide in peer

mediators. In addition, participants believed that the PAL program was effective because a specific location was provided for mediation and the program was advertised to students and staff as an important resource. The finding for the fourth related research question was that none of the examined archival records presented evidence of the effectiveness of the PAL program in resolving student conflicts. The archival data that I sought were evaluations of the PAL program and evaluations of the peer mediation sessions. However, I was unable to collect this archival data because I was unable to find any written evidence of program effectiveness, and paxUnited had stopped providing consultation services to the school district that I investigated.

The key finding related to the central research question was that the PAL program positively impacted peer mediators because participants believed they were able to fulfill their desire to help their peers resolve conflicts, and they were able to use the skills they had learned to resolve their personal conflicts outside of school with family members and friends. In addition, participants believed that the PAL program positively impacted their lives because they developed valuable mediation skills such as listening to other individuals, developing empathy for other people, patience, and learning how to remain neutral. No negative impact of the PAL program on trained peer mediators was found.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The findings for this study are interpreted in relation to the conceptual framework and the literature review for this study. The related research questions are interpreted first

in relation to the literature review, followed by the central research question, which is interpreted in relation to both the conceptual framework and the literature review.

### **Perceptions of Peer Mediator Role**

The key finding concerning how peer mediators for the PAL program perceived their role in resolving conflicts was that participants believed their role as peer mediators involved maintaining a positive attitude during mediation sessions, remaining neutral during mediation sessions, and preparing for actual mediation sessions by participating in practice sessions. The research literature supports this finding. Heydenberk and Heydenberk (2007) explored the use of conflict resolution in primary classrooms to resolve bullying behaviors and found that successful conflict resolution programs for these students depend on the development of specific cognitive and social skills. These cognitive and social skills are necessary in creating a caring community, including developing an effective mediation vocabulary, problem-solving skills, and communication strategies (Heydenberk et al., 2007).

For this dissertation study, PAL program students were also trained in specific cognitive and social skills, such as remaining neutral, active listening, problem solving, and maintaining positive attitudes, in order to conduct effective mediations with their peers. In other supporting research, Harris and Walton (2008) investigated the narratives of elementary school students to determine how these students resolved conflicts and found that students used specific communication and negotiation skills to resolve their conflicts. In a discussion of potential bias in peer mediation, Wing (2009) maintained that inequality occurs in the mediation process when mediators do not remain neutral. In

observations of the peer mediation process, Wing also noted that disputants often raise questions concerning the fairness and neutrality of peer mediators. In this study, participants in the PAL program also discussed the importance of remaining neutral in order to find the best solution for disputants.

### **Expectations of Peer Mediator Role**

Concerning the expected role of peer mediators in the PAL program, the key finding was that documents and archival records revealed clear expectations for peer mediators. The PAL program website revealed specific expectations for trained peer mediators, including learning group building skills, leadership skills, communication techniques, problem solving and decision making skills, self-awareness and self-esteem skills, understanding risk and protective factors, cultural competency skills, awareness of service learning opportunities, and gaining knowledge of preventive issues. Course descriptions included specific expectations for peer mediators. The PAL I course description indicated that students were expected to work as peer facilitators with younger students on their own campuses and/or feeder middle and elementary schools. Participants were trained in a variety of skills that enabled them to assist other students in having a more positive and productive school experience.

The description for the PAL II course also indicated that students were expected to develop higher-level skills, such as training first-year students to become peer mediators, providing community service, group facilitation, and accelerated service delivery. These peer mediators were also expected to assist feeder schools in the implementation and management of conflict management teams. In addition, peer



mediation training documents also revealed specific expectations for students. In terms of selecting students for peer mediation training, the paxUnited partners agreement stipulated that selected students should be characterized by having high levels of trust among their peers and be ready to assist them. In addition, these selected peer mediators should constitute a representative cross-section of the student body and should demonstrate a high level of ownership and responsibility in relation to the program.

In Day 1 of a 3-day, required training session, peer training documents indicated that students were expected to learn how to get to know each other, to understand the role of the mediator, to understand the ways and means of mediation, to practice the rules of mediation, to practice storytelling, and to actively listen for feelings. In Day 2, students were expected to learn how to mediate conflicts that included learning teamwork, learning how to actively listen, understanding how to address needs and solutions, learning neutrality, learning how to make good agreements, practicing agreements and closure, and learning how to consider all points of view. In Day 3, students were expected to learn how to deal with anger, how to deal with angry disputants, and to discuss issues related to the implementation of the mediation process.

Research also supports these findings. In a study about the perspectives of primary school peer mediators on their mediation practices, Kacmaz (2011) found that students who are trained as peer mediators display improved behavior in school and in their relationships with friends. In this study, PAL program peer mediators also described improved relationships with their friends and family. Cantrell, Savage, and Rehfuss (2007) investigated how to reduce levels of elementary school violence with peer

mediation and found that the Peace Pal program reduced the number of out-of-school suspensions and verbal conflicts among elementary school students. However, for this study, no written evidence was found that indicated suspensions and verbal conflicts among students were reduced. Morgado and Oliveria (2010) also explored the peer mediation process for resolving conflicts and found that peer mediators learned how to manage conflicts and improved their social skills, self-esteem, and empathy for others. Participants in this study also reported that they used their mediation skills to resolve personal conflicts with their family and friends outside of school. Hendry (2010) reviewed current research on peer mediation in schools and found that peer mediation training is effective for students in learning conflict resolution skills, such as taking control of the existing conflict, communicating constructively about the conflict, understanding the other party's perspective of the conflict, and generating an agreement that will help resolve the conflict. Hendry also argued that mediation can be effectively used to address school disaffection. For this study, participants reported that making introductions was an important part of conducting effective mediations because students need to understand the role of the peer mediator in resolving their conflicts. In other research, Wing (2009) explored growing concerns about inequality and fairness associated with mediation practices and found that mediators need to remain neutral in resolving conflicts. Participants in this study also believed that remaining neutral helped disputants find the best solution to the conflict.

Thus, several similarities emerged among the data sources between the actual role that peer mediators believed they played in the PAL program and the expected role that

program documents described. One similarity between the participants and the documents about role expectations concerned building cultural competency skills. Documents revealed that peer mediators were expected to adopt an outreach approach, making contact with other students they do not know, or who may be different from them, and offering assistance. Peer mediators were also expected to take the initiative in making new students feel comfortable, to keep an open mind and try to understand different perspectives, to understand that all people are different, and to appreciate those differences and similarities. Peer mediators in this study also supported this notion of cultural competency. Ceree commented, “We mentor elementary students. We help with special needs kids.” Nancy, also noted that the coach expected PAL program students to work with different students. Participants also learned to use conflict resolution skills within their own family culture to resolve conflicts. Alia commented, “Whenever I fight with my mom now, we get through it easier. We don't fight as much because I have those skills.” Leslie added, “I was helping solve a problem between my two older brothers. And they're like, ‘Well, this happened, and I'm like, ‘Oh, so how do you think this could work?’ I just feel like I am [helping others without them] even knowing it.”

Another similarity concerned the cultural competency skill of maintaining a positive attitude during mediation. Participants in this study reported that one of their major responsibilities as peer mediators was to maintain a positive attitude by focusing on how disputants were feeling and the outcomes of the mediation, not on the behavior that brought disputants to the session. Documents related to the description for the PAL I and PAL II courses also indicated peer mediators were trained in a variety of skills that

enabled them to assist other students in having a more positive and productive school experience. Research also supports the importance of maintaining a positive attitude as peer mediators in resolving conflicts. In a discussion about shifting school culture, Alfred and Bendich (2012) found that restorative justice practices helped students to improve their behavior and attitudes in school, and as a result, the number of fights, suspensions, and referrals at school were reduced. In an evaluation of Project WIN, a conflict resolution program implemented at a middle school, Roberts, Yeomans, and Ferro-Almeida (2007) found that violence in school was nonexistent during the implementation of Project WIN because students learned to be cooperative when encountering conflicts. Smith-Sanders and Harter (2007) explored a junior high conflict resolution program and found that this program helped students develop self-confidence that resulted in improved relations with other students.

Another similarity between participant beliefs about their role as peer mediators and document expectations about their role concerned the cultural competency skill of remaining neutral. Participants also reported that remaining neutral during mediation was important in order to find the best solution to the conflict. Peer mediation training documents also revealed that participants were required to learn how to remain neutral in helping their peers resolve disputes. Research also supports the importance of maintaining neutrality in effective mediation Wing (2009) noted that mediation produces substantive procedural inequality when mediators do not remain neutral while mediating conflicts. Wing suggested that resolving conflicts collaboratively depends on a mediator's desire to hear all sides of an argument. In order for neutrality to occur, Wing

found that peer mediators need to be impartial because the mediation process has often been criticized for not recognizing power imbalances.

An additional similarity among data sources about the role of peer mediators concerned the need to be prepared to conduct peer mediation sessions. Participants believed that preparing for mediation sessions, such as holding mock mediation sessions in which they introduced themselves to disputants and explained their role, were important in helping disputants reach an agreement. Leslie believed that practicing how to resolve conflicts related to real life situations helped her become a more effective peer mediator. Alia stated that working through a conflict scenario with the PAL program trainer was beneficial because they received immediate feedback on their conflict resolution skills. Documents related to the PAL websites also provided information about how to help students prepare for mediation sessions by helping them develop specific conflict resolution skills, including listening, paraphrasing, decision-making, developing relationships, and identifying bullying behavior.

A final similarity among data sources concerned the expectation of peer mediators to help their peers make good choices in life. Participants reported that they wanted to encourage their peers to make good choices by modeling them. Documents for this study indicated that peer mediators were expected to assess the needs of the school community, participate actively in the school community, know the resources within the school community and be able to refer students to those resources, model healthy life choices, and encourage peers to make healthy life choices. Research also supports the importance of modeling good choices for students in the peer mediation process. In a discussion

about preparing for peace, Lederach (1995) maintained that conflict resolution trainers need to be nonjudgmental mediators in order for to reach a fair solution. Allen (2011) conducted a quasi-experimental study on the Peacemakers program, which is designed to promote conflict avoidance, conflict resolution skills, and respect for other individuals. Allen found that students who participated in the Peacemakers program demonstrated an increased use of conflict resolution skills and respect for others. In a study about restorative justice in the classroom, Johnson and Johnson( 2012) found that these practices are effective when a cooperative context is developed, which involves resolving conflicts constructively and using integrative negotiations and mediation that leads to positive relationships.

### **Perceived Effectiveness of PAL Program**

In relation to the effectiveness of the PAL program, peer mediators believed that the PAL program was effective in resolving disputes among students because students preferred to talk to their peers than to parents or teachers and students learned to trust them and confide in them; in addition, participants believed the PAL program was effective because a specific location was provided for mediation and the program was advertised to students and staff as an important resource.

Research also supports this finding. In a study about the perspectives of primary school peer mediators on their mediation practices, Kacmaz (2011) found that students who are trained as peer mediators reported that mediation made them feel special by helping them to solve conflicts among their friends and improving their relationships with peers. In a discussion about shifting school culture, Alfred and Bendich (2012) concluded

that implementing restorative justice practices in American schools requires educators to observe student interactions, which indicate that students often prefer to talk to one another about their conflicts rather than to adults. Graves, Frabutt, and Vigliano (2007) explored teaching conflict resolution skills to middle and high schools students through interactive drama and role play and found that students improved their communication skills and increased their awareness about more positive ways to handle conflict. In this study, peer mediators also reported that they valued active practice sessions in which they could role play different types of conflicts.

### **Actual Effectiveness of PAL Program**

The key finding was that no documents and archival records were found about the effectiveness of the PAL Program in reducing student conflicts or the effectiveness of the training sessions for peer mediators. Research, however, indicates that conflict resolution programs are often effective in reducing student conflicts. Roberts, Yeoman, and Ferro (2007) found that a positive school climate develops when middle school students are trained in conflict resolution skills. In a longitudinal study, Ttofi, Farrington, Losel, and Loeber (2011) explored the predictive efficiency of school bullying versus later offending and found that school bullying is a risk factor and anti-bullying programs help to create safer schools. Graves, Frabutt, and Vigliano (2007) found that teaching conflict resolution skills to middle and high school students through interactive drama and role play encourages them to consider nonviolent alternatives. In a study about student conflict as an opportunity to change, Morgado and Oliviera (2010) determined that peer mediators help students improve their social skills, self-esteem, and empathy for others.

Johnson and Johnson (2012) explored restorative justice practices in the classroom, and they found restorative justice practices are based on a set of civic values, which promote healing, repairing, restoring and preventing harm. In addition, research indicates that peer mediators who are trained in conflict resolution skills help improve relationships among their peers. Cantrell (2007) found that participation in school mediation programs equips student mediators with specific negotiation skills and techniques in conflict resolution. Smith-Sanders and Harter (2007) explored a specific conflict resolution program at a junior high school and found that this program helped students develop self-confidence and improved relations with other students. Alfred and Bendich (2012) found that restorative justice practices helped students to improve their behavior and attitudes in school, reducing the number of fights and suspensions. Kacmaz (2011) found that students who are trained as peer mediators demonstrate improved behavior in school and improved relationships with their friends.

### **Impact of Conflict Resolution Program**

For the primary research question, the key finding was that the PAL program *positively* impacted peer mediators. The participants believed they were able to fulfill their desire to help their peers resolve conflicts, and they were able to use the skills they had learned to resolve their personal conflicts outside of school with family members and friends. In addition, participants believed that the PAL program positively impacted their lives because they developed valuable mediation skills such as active listening, empathy for other people, patience, and remaining neutral.



Research supports this finding about the positive impact of conflict resolution programs on peer mediators as well as other students who participate in them. Smith-Sanders and Harter (2007) explore the effectiveness of a specific conflict resolution program called Students Taking Active Responsibility (STAR), in which teachers present lessons on anger management, respect, and bullying prevention. Smith-Sanders and Harter found that as a result of participation in STAR, students developed self-confidence and improved relations with other students, teachers, and administrators. Cantrell, Savage, and Reh fuss (2007) examined the effectiveness of a conflict resolution program in reducing elementary school violence through peer mediation and found that peer mediators are effective in resolving verbal conflicts among their peers as opposed to resolving physical conflicts that often lead to school suspensions.

In other supporting studies, Morgado and Oliviera (2010) explored peer mediation in resolving student conflicts. They found that the use of disciplinary methods such as referrals and suspensions are often used to solve conflicts but are not successful. Morgado and Oliviera also found that peer mediators help other students improve their social skills, self-esteem, and empathy. Morgado and Oliviera concluded that peer mediators assume an important role in helping their peers use conflict as a source for positive change and growth. In another study about the effectiveness of conflict resolution programs, Roberts, Yeomans, and Ferro-Almeida (2007) examined the evaluation of Project WIN (Working out Integrated Negotiation), a program for middle school students in an urban school district in southeast Pennsylvania. Roberts et al. found that, as a result of this training, 85% of these middle school students achieved mastery in

conflict resolution skills, such as listening attentively to others, clearly expressing the needs of the disputants, and managing anger effectively.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study, which is based on Erikson's stages of human development and Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, also supports the positive impact of conflict resolution programs on students who participate in them. Erikson noted that adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 are faced with the daunting task of developing their own identity and in forming close relationships with peers. Erikson also noted that young adults between the ages of 18 and 40 are faced with the continuing challenge of developing intimate relationships with other people. Adolescents often find it difficult to talk openly to their parents about their problems. In this study, participants also reported that students would rather talk to peers who have had similar experiences and who can relate to their problems than to adults. Adolescence is also a stage where adolescents may become confused and disturbed by various conflicts in their lives. In addition, these adolescents often struggle to make lasting commitments. During this stage, adolescents are often uncertain about what they want to do or who they are, and they may experience a sense of isolation from others. Conflict resolution programs, such as the PAL Program, provide all students, not only trained peer mediators, with the opportunities to listen to other adolescents in conflict, rather than to judge them. Conflict resolution programs also provide strategies that empower adolescents to resolve their own conflicts.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1968) contended that freedom is a struggle that exists between the oppressor and the oppressed. Freire also believed that positive societal change would emerge only from the education of oppressed groups who need to understand the obstacles that block their hopes. Freire believed that conflict occurs when oppressors fail to realize that others are treated unjustly. Freire's theoretical constructs about oppression are the foundation for conflict resolution because social oppression impacts society by dehumanizing some individuals and giving power to certain groups at the expense of others. Freire believed that love for other humans is the foundation for eliminating societal oppression. Freire called for the liberation of the oppressed. In order for this liberation to take place, Freire believed that both the oppressed and the oppressors must first recognize the conflict. In conflict resolution programs that include a peer mediation process, adolescents must also be willing to acknowledge their conflicts in front of their peers, so that all parties in the mediation process are able to communicate. Once individuals are able to work through conflicts in a nonviolent way, Freire and Erikson argued that healthy relationships can be developed.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this case study are related to the research design. The first limitation was that this study used a single case design, rather than a multiple case design. Yin (2014) noted that the presentation of two or more cases generally results in more significant findings than a single case. My original intent for this study was to present two cases with 6 participants included in each case, which would have provided richer data; however, one school district declined the study.

The second limitation concerned the sample size. Only four participants returned their consent forms to participate in my study, which may have limited this study because a larger number of students would have provided richer data. In addition, no male students were included in the participant group.

The third limitation concerned the data collection plan. Due to resource constraints and problems with site and participant selection, I was able to only interview participants once by telephone rather than in person because the research site was a considerable distance from my home. I believe that I would have obtained richer data if I had been able to interview these students in person multiple times. In addition, I was not able to obtain archival records about the effectiveness of the PAL program or the peer mediation training, which limited the findings of this study.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations for this study are related to the suggestions that peer mediators presented in their reflective journals about improving the PAL program. Participants believed that more practice mediation sessions should be scheduled prior to conducting the actual mediation sessions because they would be better prepared to conduct these mediations. In addition, participants believed that advertising the PAL program could help other students understand the purposes of mediation. Participants also believed that the PAL program could be improved if educators would design training sessions so that students would be more actively involved in the peer mediation process. Participants also believed that selecting students who believed in the peer mediation process was critical to the success of the program.

The first recommendation is that the design and implementation of the peer mediation training sessions needs to include more active participation from students in order to sustain student interest in becoming trained mediators. More active participation provides an opportunity for peer mediators to enjoy these training sessions while learning specific mediation skills. Facilitators, therefore, should explore creative strategies in implementing these training sessions, such as inviting high school graduates who served as peer mediators to speak to students, incorporating conflict resolution games, and dividing students into teams to unscramble words related to conflict. Another suggestion would be have students participate in a teamwork activities such as tower building, in which students are divided into several groups with limited tools to build the tallest possible free-standing structure. The goal of this activity is to increase student participation, motivation, and confidence in relation to the peer mediation process.

The second recommendation is that educators should consistently and frequently evaluate the outcomes for conflict resolution programs and their related peer mediation training. Conflict resolution programs can be evaluated in several ways. One way is to determine if the number of discipline referrals decline from the previous year. Another way is to keep a log of the number of mediations that are conducted each week. This log should include the grade level, sex, and race of the disputants in order to track types of student conflicts and related demographics and to implement early interventions. In addition, reasons for student conflicts should be documented. Peer mediation training sessions should also be evaluated to ensure that mediations are conducted appropriately, such as pairing a strong mediator with a student who needs immediate help. Consistent

and frequent evaluations of conflict resolution programs also provide support for educators in seeking funding and community support.

The third recommendation is that educators should actively promote conflict resolution programs so that all students are aware of this valuable resource. Students who have participated in the program in the past could be included in efforts to advertise the program at all schools in the district. Educators should also create a clear vision for conflict resolution programs so that everyone is involved and supportive. This vision can be posted throughout the school and the district. All school district administrators should share this vision and support funding for these programs.

The fourth recommendation is that additional research needs to be conducted to determine if conflict resolution programs actually reduce school violence that contributes to a hostile learning environment. Students who experience a hostile environment are often prevented from learning. Additional research on conflict resolution programs could foster a deeper understanding for students, educators and parents about the importance of implementing a successful nonviolent approach to resolving student conflicts. Researchers could also explore the long-term effects of reducing violence in schools on the learning environment for students.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The first contribution that this study makes to positive social change is that educators and researchers will develop a better understanding of how conflict resolution programs positively impact peer mediators and other students in relation to reducing student conflicts and in developing life-long skills such as negotiation, communication,

and decision-making. When students use these skills to promote nonviolence in their schools and communities, the number of discipline referrals, suspensions, and fights are often reduced and opportunities for developing a peaceful learning environment are increased.

The second contribution that this study makes to positive social change is that educators and researchers may be able to design and implement more effective conflict resolution programs and related peer mediation services, particularly in urban high schools. Peer mediation services are especially needed in urban high schools because student populations are often diverse, and students lack understanding of cultures other than their own. Adolescent students often do not have the necessary skills to form healthy relationships, particularly when different cultures are involved. When students learn these skills, they form healthy relationships that benefit schools, homes, and communities.

The third contribution to positive social change is that this study provides school counselors and other educators with recommendations about how to develop more effective early intervention strategies for resolving student conflict, particularly in large urban high schools. Counselors can use these strategies to deescalate conflicts that students experience in public schools. This study also provides assistance to school counselors in obtaining more effective resources for working with young adolescents in resolving conflicts peacefully.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an urban high school conflict resolution program on peer mediators. The research literature on conflict

resolution suggested that conflict has been present in civilization since the beginning of human history and continues to this present day. In addition, human perspectives on conflict are often significantly different, particularly in relation to the concept of culture. Culture may play an important role in student conflicts in school because of students often lack understanding and knowledge about cultures other than their own. Students may dislike other students because of how they look, how they dress, what they eat, where they live, and the language they use. Cultural differences are often difficult for many students to accept. Rather than accepting these differences, students often view their culture as superior to other cultures.

Many students who come from other countries do not feel welcome in schools because they look and talk differently than other students. These students often gravitate to others who are similar in appearance so they can feel like they belong. Other students often bully these students because of these differences. Therefore, conflict resolution programs and related peer mediation services are needed in urban high schools because they provide opportunities for diverse student populations to address their differences. Peer mediators are particularly important in resolving these conflicts because they are trained in cultural competency skills such as remaining neutral, actively listening to both sides of an disagreement, working with diverse groups of students such as special needs and at-risk populations, and demonstrating positive attitudes and a willingness to find solutions to conflicts among their peers.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1968) contended that individuals are often dehumanized at the expense of others. Schools and communities, therefore, should take



responsibility for creating and maintaining a safe learning environment for all students.

The first step in developing safe schools is to understand that all students are equal. With safe schools will come safe communities, safe states, and safe countries. In order to create these safe schools, students will need to be trained in conflict resolution skills using nonviolent techniques in order to develop cultural competence.

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## Appendix A: District Letter of Correspondence

November, 2014

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Carolyn Waldon, and I am a PhD candidate in education at Walden University, which is a North Central Accredited (NCA) institution of higher learning. My research interest is in conflict resolution. Urban high school students are often involved in conflicts related to bullying, physical fighting, and drug abuse. These conflicts can create a learning environment that stifles the academic performance of students, and therefore, interventions such as conflict resolution programs are needed to prevent disruptions to learning.

For my study, I am interested in exploring how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacts trained peer mediators. I will discuss how current high school students who participated as peer mediators describe their role as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program. The title of my proposed study is *Impact of an Urban High School Conflict Resolution Program on Peer Mediators: A Single Case Study*.

With the principal's approval, I will ask the school counselor from the high school to give me the names of potential participants for this study, based on specific inclusion criteria, which includes the following: (a) participants must be enrolled in the high school selected for this study, (b) participants must have participated in a conflict resolution program as peer mediators at this high school, (c) participants must have received

training as peer mediators at this high school, and (d) participants must have parental permission to participate in this study. Once I have received a list of potential participants from the high school, I will mail the parents and their child a letter of invitation explaining the purpose of this study and asking them to sign and return an enclosed consent form and assent form to me in a self-addressed stamped envelope, if the child is interested in participating. I will select the first six participants who send me their signed consent and assent forms. After these signed consent and assent forms are returned to me, I will then contact each participant by telephone to explain the data collection procedures and to schedule the individual interviews. I will conduct individual interviews by telephone. Interviews conducted by telephone will be completed during noninstructional time, most likely in the evening. Each interview will be about 30 to 45 minutes in length. I will also audio record each of the interviews. In addition, I will ask participants to complete an online reflection journal that includes three brief questions about their experiences as peer mediators in a conflict resolution program. I will also collect archival documents related to these conflict resolution programs.

Participants may benefit from participating in this study by developing a deeper understanding about the impact of a conflict resolution program on their role as peer mediators. The risks related to participating in this study are minimal; for example, some participants may find some of the interview questions challenging to answer.

I would appreciate your permission to conduct this study with current high school students of your district. I will abide by all district rules in conducting this study. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Waldon  
PhD Candidate in Education  
Walden University

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Carolyn Waldon  
PhD candidate in Education  
Walden University

November, 2014

Dear Ms. Waldon,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study titled *Impact of an Urban High School Conflict Resolution Program on Peer Mediators: A Comparative Case Study* in this school district.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing you with the names of potential participants for this study. We also reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Director of Program Evaluation

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## Appendix B: District Letter of Correspondence

Principal

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Carolyn Waldon, and I am a PhD candidate in education at Walden University, which is a North Central Accredited (NCA) institution of higher learning. My research interest is in conflict resolution. Urban high school students are often involved in conflicts related to bullying, physical fighting, and drug abuse. These conflicts can create a learning environment that stifles the academic performance of students, and therefore, interventions such as conflict resolution programs are needed to prevent disruptions to learning.

For my study, I am interested in exploring how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacts trained peer mediators. I will discuss how current high school students who participated as peer mediators describe their role as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program. The title of my proposed study is *Impact of an Urban High School Conflict Resolution Program on Peer Mediators: A Single Case Study*.

With your approval, I will ask the school counselor from the high school to give me the names of potential participants for this study, based on specific inclusion criteria, which includes the following: (a) participants must be enrolled in the high school selected for this study, (b) participants must have participated in a conflict resolution program as peer mediators at this high school, (c) participants must have received training as peer

mediators at this high school, and (d) participants must have parental permission to participate in this study. Once I have received a list of potential participants from the high school, I will mail the parents and their child a letter of invitation explaining the purpose of this study and asking them to sign and return an enclosed consent form and assent form to me in a self-addressed stamped envelope, if the child is interested in participating. I will select the first six participants who send me their signed consent and assent forms. After these signed consent and assent forms are returned to me, I will then contact each participant by telephone to explain the data collection procedures and to schedule the individual interviews. I will conduct individual interviews by telephone. Interviews conducted by telephone will be completed during noninstructional time, most likely in the evening. Each interview will be about 30 to 45 minutes in length. I will also audio record each of the interviews. In addition, I will ask participants to complete an online reflection journal that includes three brief questions about their experiences as peer mediators in a conflict resolution program. I will also collect archival documents related to these conflict resolution programs.

Participants may benefit from participating in this study by developing a deeper understanding about the impact of a conflict resolution program on their role as peer mediators. The risks related to participating in this study are minimal; for example, some participants may find some of the interview questions challenging to answer.

I would appreciate your permission to conduct this study with current high school students of your district. I will abide by all district rules in conducting this study. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Waldon  
PhD candidate in Education  
Walden University

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Carolyn Waldon  
PhD candidate in Education  
Walden University  
1  
November, 2014

Dear Ms. Waldon,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Impact of an Urban High School Conflict Resolution Program on Peer Mediators: A Comparative Case Study* in this school district.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include providing you with the names of potential participants for this study and allowing you to conduct interviews at our school. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University.

Sincerely,

Principal

## Appendix C: Invitation Letter

December, 2014

Hello,

My name is Carolyn Waldon, and I am doing a research study about how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacts trained peer mediators. In order to accomplish this purpose, I will compare an urban high school conflict resolution program. I will discuss how high school students who participated as peer mediators describe their role as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program. I am inviting all students at this high school who are trained as peer mediators to participate in this study. Your child is one of these students.

Please read the letter of consent carefully. If you are interested in allowing your child to participate in this study, please sign the letter of consent and ask your child to sign the letter of assent, if he or she is interested in participating in this study. You will also need to provide your child's telephone number so that I can contact him or her about the data collection process. Please send your signed letter of consent and your child's signed letter of assent in the self-addressed envelope and return them to me as soon as possible because I will select the first six students who return their signed consent and assent forms to me. After these signed consent forms are returned to me, I will contact your child by telephone to schedule the individual interview and to explain how I will collect the reflective journal data. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at the contact information below.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Waldon  
PhD Candidate in Education  
Walden University

## Appendix D: Parent Letter of Consent

This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to allow your child to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Carolyn Waldon who is a doctoral student at Walden University, a fully accredited institution of higher learning.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, your child will be asked to:

- Participate in an individual interview by telephone. Each interview will last 30 to 45 minutes and will be audio recorded.
- Submit an online reflective journal that will take less than 30 minutes to complete.
- Review my interpretation of their individual interviews and journal entries for their credibility, which should take less than 30 minutes to complete

Here are some sample interview questions:

1. How long did you participate as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?
2. Why did you decide to become a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?
3. Describe your role as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision about whether or not you want your child to participate in this study. No one at this high school will treat you or your child differently if you or your child decides not to participate in this study. If you give your consent now, you or your child can still change your mind later. If your child feels stressed during this study, he or she may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The benefit of participating in this study is that your child may develop a deeper understanding of the impact of an urban high school conflict resolution program on peer mediators.

The risks of participating in this study are minimal. For example, your child may find some of the interview and reflective journal questions challenging to answer.

**Payment:**

No compensation will be provided for your participation in this study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not include your child's name or anything else that could identify your child in any reports of this study. The only time the researcher would need to share your child's name or information would be if the researcher learns about possible harm to your child or someone else. Computer data will be password protected.

Data will be kept for a period of 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact me at 979-204-9308 or email me at [cjwaldon@gmail.com](mailto:cjwaldon@gmail.com). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this matter with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.** I will give you a copy of this form to keep.

The researcher will provide an extra copy of this form for you to keep.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

Carolyn Waldon  
PhD Candidate in Education  
Walden University

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my child's involvement this optional research project. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Parent

Printed Name of Child

Date of consent

Parent's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Telephone Number

## Appendix E: Assent Form for Students

Hello,

My name is Carolyn Waldon, and I am conducting a research study about conflict resolution. I am interested in exploring how an urban high school conflict resolution program impacts trained peer mediators. I am inviting you to participate in this study because you are a student at this high school, and you have participated in the conflict resolution program at this school as a trained peer mediator.

I have enclosed a letter of consent, which includes an explanation of the data collection procedures that I will follow if you agree to participate in this study. If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign the letter of consent and return it to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope within one week. Please provide your telephone number so that I am able to contact you to schedule the interview. I will select the first six students who return their assent and consent forms to me. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an individual interview by telephone that will take 30 to 45 minutes to complete and that will be audio recorded.
- Submit an online reflective journal that will take less than 30 minutes to complete.
- Review my interpretation of their individual interviews and journal entries for their credibility, which should take less than 30 minutes to complete

Here are some sample interview questions:

1. How long did you participate as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?
2. Why did you decide to become a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?
3. Describe your role as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program.

#### IT'S YOUR CHOICE:

You don't have to be in this project if you don't want to. If you decide now that you want to join the project, you can still change your mind later. If you want to stop, you can.

#### PRIVACY:

Everything you tell me during this project will be kept private. That means that no one else will know your name or what answers you gave. The only time I have to tell someone is if I learn about something that could hurt you or someone else.

#### ASKING QUESTIONS:

You can ask me any questions you want now. If you think of a question later, you or your parents can reach me at 979-204-9308. If you or your parents would like to ask my university a question, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. Her phone number is 612-312-1210.

I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

Thank you for your consideration and support.



Name of Student

Student Signature

Date

Researcher Signature

Telephone

Carolyn Waldon  
PhD Candidate in Education  
Walden University

## Appendix F: Interview Questions

1. How long did you participate as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?
2. Why did you decide to become a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?
3. Describe your role as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program.
4. What specific strategies did you use as a peer mediator to help students resolve conflicts?
5. Were you sometimes unable to help students resolve disputes? Why or why not?
6. Do you believe that this conflict resolution program was effective in resolving disputes among students? Why or why not?
7. Describe the impact of this conflict resolution program on your role as a peer mediator.

## Appendix G: Reflective Journal Questions

Day 1: What suggestions do you have for improving peer mediation training?

Day 2: What suggestions do you have for improving conflict resolution programs in general?

Day 3: How has this conflict resolution program and your role as a peer mediator impacted your life?

## Appendix H: Alignment of Interview and Reflective Journal Questions

### With Research Questions

*Central Research Question: How does an urban high school conflict resolution program impact trained peer mediators?*

IQ 1: How long did you participate as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?

IQ2: Why did you decide to become a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?

IQ3: Describe your role as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program.

IQ4: What specific strategies did you use as a peer mediator to help students resolve conflicts?

IQ5: Were you sometimes unable to resolve disputes? Why or why not?

IQ6: Do you believe that this conflict resolution program was effective in resolving disputes among students? Why or why not?

IQ7: Describe the impact of this conflict resolution program on your role as a peer mediator.

RJQ1: What suggestions do you have for improving peer mediation training?

RJQ2: What suggestions do you have for improving conflict resolution programs in general?

RJQ3: How has this conflict resolution program and your role as a peer mediator impacted your life?

*Related Research Question 1: How do high school students who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program describe their role in resolving conflicts?*

IQ1: How long did you participate as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?

IQ2: Why did you decide to become a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program?

IQ3: Describe your role as a peer mediator in this conflict resolution program.

IQ4: What specific strategies did you use as a peer mediator to help students resolve conflicts?

IQ5: Were you sometimes unable to help students resolve conflicts? Why or why not?

*Related research Question 2: What do archival records reveal about the expected role of peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program?*

No interview questions or reflective journal questions are needed.

*Related research question 3: What do high school graduates who participated as peer mediators in an urban high school conflict resolution program believe about the effectiveness of this program in helping students resolve conflicts?*

IQ6: Do you believe that this conflict resolution program was effective in resolving disputes among students? Why or why not?

IQ7: Please describe the impact of this conflict resolution program on your role as a peer mediator.

RJQ 1: What suggestions do you have for improving peer mediation training ?

RJQ 2: What suggestions do you have for improving conflict resolution programs in general?

RJQ 3: How has this conflict resolution program and your role as a peer mediator impacted your life?

*Related research question 4: What do archival records reveal about the effectiveness of an urban high school conflict resolution program in resolving student conflicts?*

No interview or reflective journal questions are needed.

## Appendix I Confidentiality Form

**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**

**Name of Signer:** P A R A D I G M REPORTING & CAPTIONING INC.

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: "Impact of an Urban High School Conflict Resolution Program on Peer Mediators: A Comparative Case Study", I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

**Signature:**

**Date:**