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The Impact of Peer Mediation on Student Mediators

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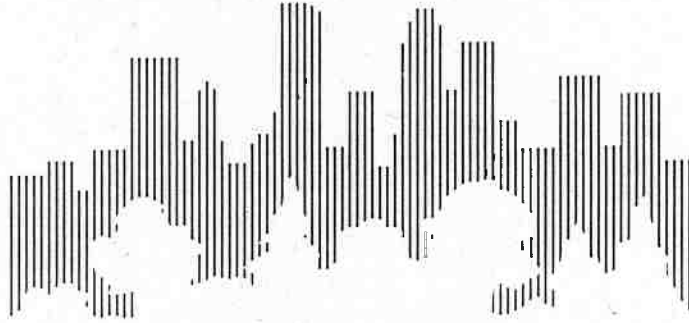
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**MASTER OF ARTS
IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS**

Lisa Laehn

**The Impact of Peer Mediation
on Student Mediators**

1998

**MSW
Thesis**

Thesis
Laehn

THE IMPACT OF PEER MEDIATION
ON
STUDENT MEDIATORS

M.S.W. Thesis

by

Lisa Laehn

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE IMPACT OF PEER MEDIATION ON STUDENT MEDIATORS

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

LISA LAEHN

SEPTEMBER 1, 1998

This qualitative study sought to expand the current knowledge of how student mediators view themselves and how their involvement in a peer mediation program impacted them. Twenty-three students, from three different elementary schools in the Elk River School System, were individually interviewed. All subjects were between the ages of 10-13, were currently involved in a peer mediation program, and had been involved for at least six months. The semi-structured interviews focused on subjects' views of the impact involvement in a peer mediation program had on their self-esteem, leadership skills, relationship skills, and school attitudes. Common themes addressed in the data include: a desire to help others as the driving factor for most students' involvement in peer mediation, improved ability to problem solve, fun in peer mediation, the impact of peer mediation on schools, drawbacks of mediation, and personal gains by mediators such as in relationships or self-esteem. The implications of this research for social workers along with future research ideas are discussed as well as limitations of this study.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's schools in the United States face many challenges. Not only are schools teaching academic subjects and trying to keep up with technology, but they also encounter many different social issues. An increasing number of children are coming to school with emotional issues while anecdotal evidence from schools suggests that students are becoming more ethnocentric and less tolerant of others (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994). The range of student values and backgrounds is enormous (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994) and children are experiencing more violence in and out of school (Curwin, 1995). This is a great concern to schools as disruptiveness increases and internal control lessens (Curwin, 1995). As more and more social issues are brought into schools by the students, the number of conflicts increase and educators are recognizing the need to address this increasing conflict. Social workers also need to address the issue of violence and conflict as it affects the lives of clients and community. Often conflict brought into the school can escalate and impact a whole family or community. Social workers must engage in the search for more positive ways for individuals and groups to use to resolve conflict.

Conflict, Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation

Conflicts are a part of everyday life (Field, 1996) and can be defined as any verbal, physical, or emotional disagreement between two or more forces in which the forces are

opposite in direction (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Conflicts can occur in any setting, they can also escalate into verbal and physical violence. The elimination of violence does not mean eliminating conflict. Some conflict can have positive outcomes and increase achievement, motivate learning, promote resiliency, and clarify the need for change (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). In today's schools there is a growing awareness of the need for children to learn peaceful, constructive ways to resolve conflicts (Field, 1996). In order to ensure the safety of children and enhance the quality of the learning environment, many schools have turned to conflict resolution programs to help students learn to resolve conflicts in a positive manner. School social workers are often instrumental in the development, training, facilitating and evaluating of peer mediation programs.

Many conflict resolution programs stress teaching all students the skills to resolve their conflicts peacefully: "Conflict resolution is a method or strategy that enables people to interact with each other in positive ways in order to resolve their differences" (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994). Conflict resolution can be used at the micro, mezzo or macro level by individuals, groups, or organization. Three reasons for teaching all students conflict resolution skills include: making the school a peaceful and orderly place, utilizing the powerful potential of conflict for educational purposes, and ensuring that future generations are equipped to resolve conflicts constructively in their adult lives (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Conflict resolution programs may include peer mediation training for all or a select group of students. In much of the literature the terms conflict resolution and peer mediation are often intertwined. This is because peer mediation programs are based on applying the skills of conflict resolution (Stomfay-Stitz, 1994).

Peer mediation is a structured process in which children are trained in several conflict resolution steps to resolve disputes for themselves and others. The steps of conflict resolution include: introductions, discussing ground rules such as no interrupting, asking each disputant to tell their side of the conflict and how they felt making sure each disputant heard the other, finding what each disputant needs to have the conflict solved, and allowing the disputants to choose a solution that is agreeable to both. Mediators are taught to use active listening, rephrasing, clarifying, redirecting, and confidentiality skills. There are two approaches to mediation: the whole school approach, or the cadre approach (Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Johnson, Johnson, Mitchell, Cotten, Harris, & Louison, 1996). The whole school approach teaches all students to be mediators, all students are given the same skills to use to solve their own conflicts. Other programs involve selecting a percentage of the student population to train in these mediation skills and this is called the cadre approach. Often this means training nominated students in the upper grade levels of the school. The mediators help their disputing peers discover solutions to their conflict and resolve it by having two mediators sit down with the people having the conflict (Tolson, McDonald, & Moriarity, 1992). These trained mediators then guide their peers through the steps in conflict resolution. The goal of these programs is to reduce negative conflicts in the schools and promote peaceful resolutions. It is hoped that students who utilize the peer mediation process will develop skills to solve their own problems peacefully (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). An additional desired and often unstated outcome of peer mediation programs is that student mediators will gain positive benefits from being a mediator. Often mediation programs seem to indicate that there are personal

there are personal benefits to student mediators, however the data to back up these claims are limited (Johnson, & Johnson, 1996; Stomfay-Stitz, 1994; Carruthers, Sweeney, Kmitta, & Harris, 1996).

Theories

Several theories guide peer mediation development and programs. Cooperative learning, where children work together towards a common goal, is one such theory. Psychosocial theory tells us the stages children go through in their lives. Children in upper elementary and junior high schools are in the process of forming their individual and social identities. The importance of providing positive learning experiences and skills for children at these stages is reflected in peer mediation. Conflict theory defines conflict as constructive or destructive. Lastly, social learning theory discusses the modeling of others that children do as they grow. Each of these theories will be discussed more in depth in the chapter titled theoretical framework.

The Purpose of this Study

As peer mediation becomes a common option in schools used to address negative conflict among students it is important to know what effects peer mediation has on the student mediators involved. This is important for both program development and policy issues. Educators and social workers must make sure that the peer mediation programs

are indeed benefiting the students involved and not harming them in any way. They must also consider, as programs and policies are developed, the responsibility of schools to ensure that all students have equal access to the knowledge about how to resolve their conflicts. This study will investigate further the benefits students gain, if any, by being a peer mediator by interviewing twenty-three students in peer mediation programs in the Elk River School District. The research question is: How does being a peer mediator impact a student especially in the areas of self-esteem, relationships, leadership skills, and school perceptions?

Overview

The following chapters examine the research on conflict resolution and peer mediation. Chapter two will explain the history of peer mediation as well as site several common themes in the literature, and weaknesses of conflict resolution and peer mediation research. Several theories that apply to peer mediation and this study will be discussed in chapter three which include psychosocial theory, cooperative learning, conflict theory and social learning theory. The methodology chapter will explain the study population, data collection and data analysis. The results of this study will be explained in chapter five and chapter six will discuss these findings as well as the implications and limitations of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The History of Mediation

Peer mediation and conflict resolution grew out of four main sources: researchers in the field of conflict resolution, advocates of nonviolence, anti-nuclear-war activists, and members of the legal profession (Johnson & Johnson, 1995 ; Maxwell, 1989). The beginning of the current interest in conflict resolution and peer mediation began in the 1960s when researchers recognized the need to advocate for a peaceful world. They started producing curriculum and programs to teach children peacemaking skills (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). Another significant event in the history of mediation and conflict resolution happened in the 1970s when the Quakers, who had been peace advocates for many years, made an effort to teach nonviolence in the schools. An early project they initiated in New York City called the Children's Creative Response to Violence, taught children conflict resolution skills and cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1995 ; Maxwell, 1989). The legal profession became involved in mediation in the 1980s when President Carter's Neighborhood Justice Centers encouraged the legal profession and communities to establish mediation centers and programs (Johnson, & Johnson, 1995; Maxwell, 1989). As a result, training of adult mediators started to become popular.

Another important factor in the development of conflict resolution and peer mediation was anti-nuclear-war advocates represented in the field of education by the Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). In 1985 the Resolving Conflict Creatively

Program began (Johnson & Johnson, 1995 ; Maxwell, 1989). This program contributed to the school climate that allowed school-based mediation programs to develop by teaching cooperative learning, dispute resolution procedures and 20 hours of peer mediation training in schools (Johnson & Johnson, 1995).

In 1984 the National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) was founded and school-based mediation became recognized as an important field (Maxwell, 1989). The number of schools using mediation grew considerably between 1985 and 1989 (Lam, 1989). In 1994 there were between 5,000-8,000 mediation programs in existence in the United States according to NAME and the number of programs continues to grow (Johnson & Johnson, 1995).

As mentioned above, mediation had roots in four sources yet mediation also became popular due to its fit with several trends. First was the fact that it addressed the growing need for peace education and nonviolent conflict resolution. The growing recognition of the need for peace education can be seen by looking at the sources that committed to developing much of the programs. Second was the drive to find more effective means of resolving conflicts (Lam, 1989). Mediation, at the micro and mezzo levels, involves examining all aspects of the problem, listening to each other, neutral involvement by the mediators, and working together for a mutually agreed upon solution (Tolson, McDonald & Moriarity, 1992). Mediation, in other words, empowers the disputants to take responsibility for ending the conflict in a peaceful way. The third reason peer mediation became popular was the trend of cooperative learning in which schools became interested in promoting cooperation and mutual respect for everyone (Johnson &

Johnson, 1987). Peer mediation, like cooperative learning, incorporates working together to solve a problem and respecting everyone involved by incorporating two mediators and two disputants in each mediation session, allowing each disputant a time to tell their story, and requiring the two disputants to agree together on a workable solution. The mediators work with the disputants and each other as guides through the mediation process.

Mediation takes cooperative learning one step further by incorporating cooperative learning into the discipline system of schools by giving students the chance to resolve their own problems instead of an adult managed discipline system doing it for them, giving the students the responsibility and accountability for their own actions as well as the expectation that they can cooperate with others respectfully to solve the conflict (Tolson, McDonald, & Moriarity, 1992). Peer mediation is helpful in the area of discipline because it encourages students to talk out their conflicts before the conflicts escalate into violence. Mediation also provides students with a sense of empowerment because they can make decisions about their own lives and the conflict that arises (Maxwell, 1989; Moriarty & McDonald, 1991). Mediation helps students to self-regulate their behavior and gives them responsibility for their actions and choices and gives students the message that the adults in the building feel they are capable of being responsible and can solve their own problem peacefully, this empowerment may be one reason why students like peer mediation.

Peer Mediation's Impact on Conflicts

Studies have shown that peer mediation programs do appear to change how students resolve their conflicts. This change is shown by a decrease in the amount of interpersonal conflicts adults deal with and a reduction in the amount of conflicts referred by teachers and students to adults in the school building when a mediation program is implemented (Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Tolson, McDonald, & Moriarity, 1992; Davis & Porter, 1985; Ehlers, 1991; Levy, 1989). In addition, students trained in mediation seem to incorporate resolution skills they have learned such as listening, asking questions, restating, clarifying, problem solving, and use more negotiation skills when solving their own conflicts. Untrained peers also use mediation to solve their conflicts, however the literature suggests that they are more effective when they enlist the help of a trained peer to guide them through the mediation steps.

Peer mediation is viewed as a way to successfully resolve a conflict by students who use the program, however, researchers point out that most programs only train a percentage of the student population to be mediators. These trained students then have more skills to handle their own conflicts than their peers who have not been trained and have not been given the same amount of skills to resolve their own conflicts (Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1994). This then may mean that the total amount of conflicts in a school may not change, but how students chose to involve others in their conflicts may change. There may be fewer referrals to adults because students chose to have their peers help them resolve their conflicts instead of involving adults in the school system.

Researchers say that to reduce the total amount of negative ways used to resolve a conflict in a school, and possibly the number of conflicts, it would be helpful to train the whole student body in conflict resolution or peer mediation (Johnson & Johnson, 1992; Johnson et al, 1996). In an all school program at one elementary school all children were trained in conflict resolution and one grade level was trained as mediators. In this situation the school reported a reduction in the number of violent responses by students in conflict and an increase in peaceful solutions (ERIC document # 361631).

Skills Gained by Mediators

This thesis is concerned with the potential that mediation training was expanding student skills for example, students trained in mediation may change how they handle a conflict due to new skills which they have acquired, such as problem solving skills, which they can directly use to solve conflicts. Also the literature refers to development of interpersonal relationship skills such as listening, problem solving, empathy, asking questions, and listening for feelings are important for children for both their present and future social adjustment (Rose, 1987). Children will need to use these interpersonal skills throughout their lifetime and furthermore, the skill of problem solving is important since it increases the amount of choices a child thinks of considering when in a conflict, something that will happen their entire life (Rose, 1987). Learning mediation skills also help students to regulate their own behavior and to be responsible for their actions (Johnson & Johnson, 1992; Moriarty & McDonald, 1991). Research has identified that students trained in

mediation report that they try to solve their conflicts through mediation and negotiation (Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, Ward, & Magnuson, 1995) and to use the specific skills of listening, clarifying, rephrasing and redirecting which they gained during mediation training and experience as a mediator (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991).

Transference of Skills

Conflict can happen anywhere and in fact conflict occurs in home situations more than at school and it is often at a more violent level (Johnson et al., 1995; Johnson, Johnson, & Dudley, 1994; Gentry, & Benenson, 1993). It is important to know if students can transfer their mediation skills to other situations because it is indicative of their ability to use these skills in the future. Conflict will always be a part of their lives and they need to know how to handle it positively. In recent research, students and parents have been asked their perceptions of how students trained to be peer mediators use their mediation skills outside the school environment(Gentry & Benenson 1993). Parents report that they perceive a reduction in the frequency of conflicts in the home and felt they needed to intervene less often (Gentry & Benenson 1993). They felt their children used more productive ways to solve their problems than they had before the student was involved in peer mediation training (Johnson, Johnson, & Dudley, 1994; Gentry & Benenson 1993; Stomfay-Stitz, 1994). Students also perceived a difference in the amount of conflicts at home and also reported that they handled them differently than before mediation training (Gentry & Benenson; Johnson, Johnson & Dudley, 1994). One study showed that

students with training used negotiation skills 40% of the time compared with less than 1% of the time by non-trained students (Johnson et al., 1995).

School Climate

School climate can be defined as the atmosphere of the schools and student and staff's perceptions of how safe, friendly and welcoming the school as a whole appears to them. One common claim in the research is that school climate improves when a peer mediation program is implemented (Lam, 1989; Tolson, McDonald & Moriarty, 1992). This change in climate may be due to a feeling of empowerment by students involved in peer mediation because they are given some responsibility and choices over their own conflicts. Peer mediation gives students another option in resolving their conflicts with peers, and students may view this option as less punishing and more cooperative than traditional discipline where adults choose how to resolve the conflict often with little focus on getting the two student disputants to give their input and work together on solving the conflict. When more students are exposed to skills of conflict resolution or peer mediation, students may learn to handle their conflicts in less destructive manners. This could improve school climate and student attitudes. Other scholars suggest that students are embarrassed by their behavior when they have to resolve issues in front of their peers so they fight less at school making the school feel like a safer place to them and others (Tolson, McDonald & Moriarty, 1992). This embarrassment may be due to the fact that students reacted without thinking and are feeling uncomfortable about their reaction; they

feel they have a certain image to uphold and having a lot of conflicts does not go well with that image; pressure from friends about getting into conflicts; or a feeling that going to peer mediation is more visible than going through traditional discipline procedures. Another factor may be that it is easier for students to blame the administrator using traditional discipline methods for the way a conflict is handled, than it is in peer mediation where the student himself makes decisions in resolving a conflict. In some surveys about school climate, peer mediators', administrators', and teachers' perceptions of school climate also changed for the better when a peer mediation program was operating in the school (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Sherrod, 1995). Yet other studies have been done that found no significant changes in school climate (Crary, 1992; McCormick, 1988; Stern & VanSlyck, 1986). More studies that look at school climate, especially as perceived by the students, would be helpful in clarifying this issue because the studies that are currently available are very broad and contradict each other.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem can be defined as judgments, thoughts and feelings by an individual about themselves and the extent to which the self is good, capable, significant, and praiseworthy (Berk, 1991). Research on self-esteem indicates that children generally have a high self esteem as they enter school (Moeller, 1994). As they grow and their cognitive ability increases, children develop a self esteem based on internal feelings of ability and external factors (Scott, Murray, Mertens & Dustin, 1990; Moeller, 1994).

Family, friends and school all affect self esteem, and there is a strong relationship between self esteem and children's everyday behavior and performance; for example, children who are seen as better liked by their peers have high social self-esteem (Berk, 1991).

Involvement in a peer mediation program may increase students' self-esteem, and some research has been done to discover if there is an increase in mediator's self esteem. In this research there does seem to be a positive correlation between self esteem and student mediators (Vanayan, White, Yuen, & Teper, 1996). Teachers concluded that participation in peer mediation enhanced their student's self-esteem and contributed to personal growth for students(Gentry & Benenson, 1993):

“Positive self-esteem can be fostered in students as they are given opportunities, to participate in decisions that relate to their lives.

Peer mediation provides a structure that allows students to participate in decision making, communicating, listening and problem solving skills. All of these skills are important in building self-esteem” (Maxwell, 1989).

More research in the area of self-esteem would add to the available literature and provide more generalizability to the data.

Research Concerns

One area of the peer mediation literature that was consistent in nearly all of the articles was a concern about peer mediation research and program evaluations.

Researchers have indicated that further research into the evaluation of peer mediation and conflict resolution is needed (Lam, 1989; Carruthers, Sweeney, Kmitta & Harris, 1996).

Specifically an area that lacks much concrete information is the research completed on the impact of mediation on school climate and on the mediators themselves (Tolson, McDonald, & Moriarty, 1992). In the study which is explained in this thesis the researcher gathered data from the peer mediators to obtain their perceptions about the impact of peer mediation on themselves. Research was gathered from three different schools to provide triangulation of the data and increase generalizability. The in-depth nature of this study also adds to the generalizability of the study. In addition this study builds on previous MSW theses written on the topic of peer mediation by former Augsburg students including Dawn Berg, 1995; Renee Ward, 1994; Julie Collins, 1997; and Jody Kirche 1997.

Much of the research done in these areas lacks supporting data despite claims of potential benefits (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). The research studies that have been performed have theoretical and conceptual problems, methodological problems and a lack of long term studies (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Theoretical and conceptual problems include the fact that there has been little attempt to determine *which* component of peer

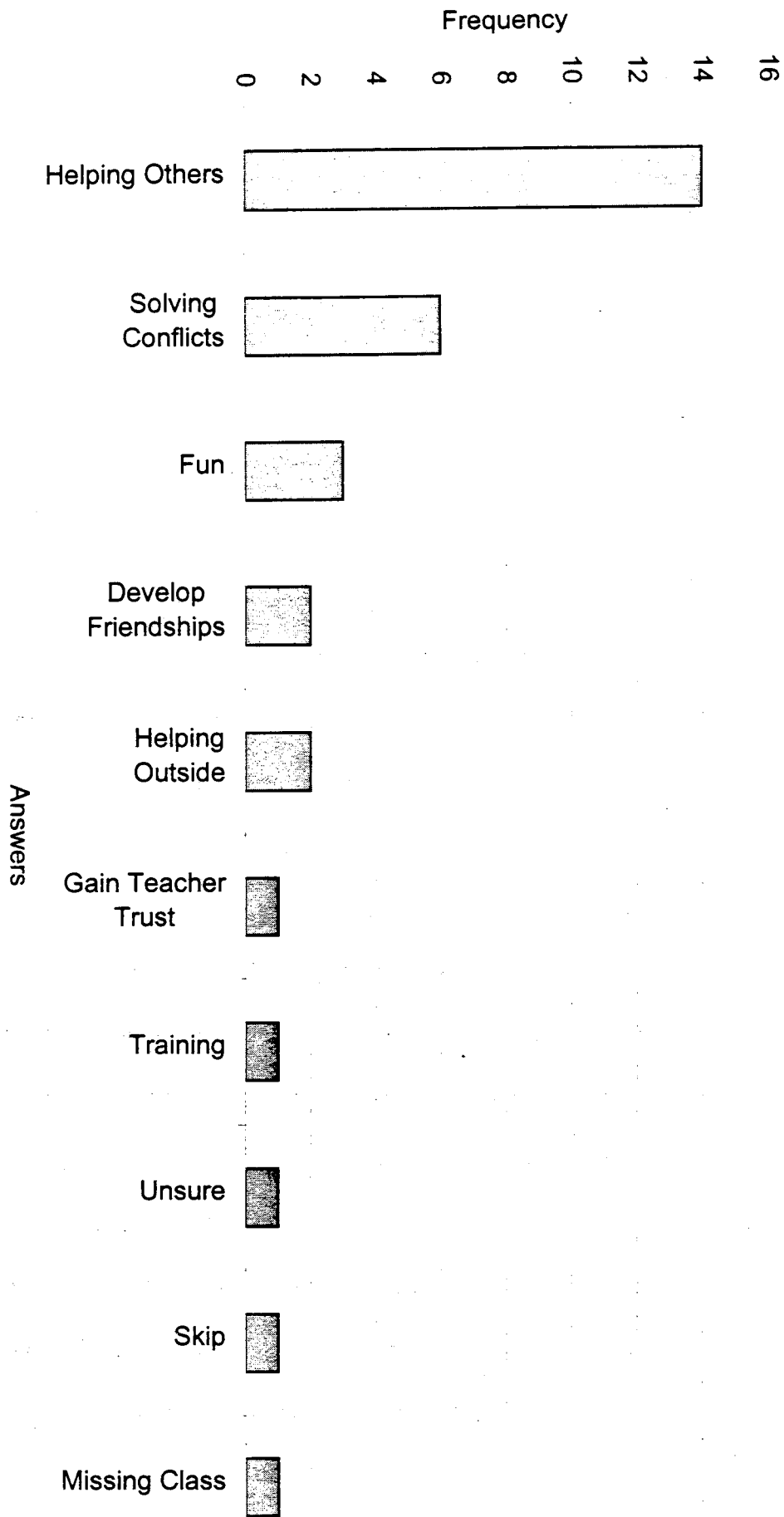


Figure 4.1
Student Likes About Being A Peer Mediator

people as reasons for why they would recommend peer mediation. One student stated that he/she thought that they (friends) should help kids too and that he/she just thought it would be good.

Problem Solving

“ I think I can solve my problems better.” -Elk River Peer Mediator.

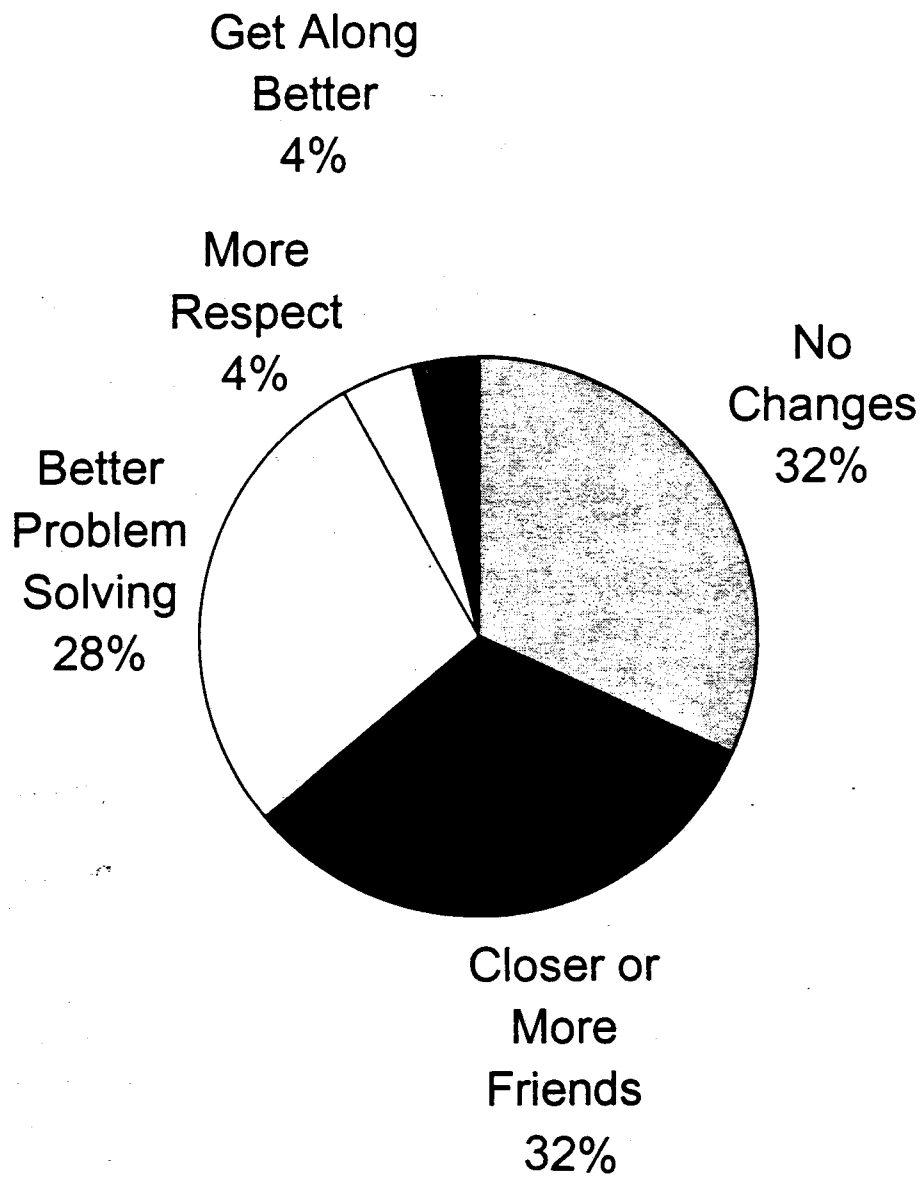
Another theme that emerged from the interviews that is closely related to helping people is peer mediators' ability to solve problems and their increased confidence in their problem solving skills. In peer mediation students are trained in problem solving skills to use when helping others solve problems and the answers to several questions indicated that students do feel they have gained some confidence and competency in solving the problems of their peers, school mates, friends, family and themselves. In question number one of the interviews, students were asked why they wanted to become a peer mediator and many students indicated the desire to help others and more specifically the desire to help resolve conflicts. Nine out of 35 responses stated that they wanted to solve problems in some capacity and two of the nine stated that they felt it would help them solve their own problems. Answers to this question ranged from “I like solving people's problems and I do it a lot at home too.” to “Well, I wanted to become a peer mediator because my friends sometimes they get in conflicts and peer mediation is kind of a thing that you know, it helps you in life and you can, it helps you figure out how you can deal with your problems better and talk instead of arguing.” See Table 4.1.

In interview question number three, what do you like about being a peer mediator, 6 out of 23 responses indicated that solving problems is one of the things they liked about mediation. One student said that: "Helping people solve their problems and knowing that I helped them," was what she/he liked and another student said that they liked that, "Most of the time you can solve their (the disputants) conflicts." Another student stated, "Well, we get to solve people's problems and help them and I get to like talk to my friends a lot too and if they are having problems, then they can just come to me and talk to me." See Figure 4.1.

Students were also asked if they felt being a peer mediator had changed them in any way (interview question number five). Five out of the 25 students stated that they felt they could solve their conflicts better after being involved in peer mediation. Answers included "Yes, I think I can solve my problems better," and "I think it has (changed me) because before I didn't, well, I knew how to solve conflicts but not as well as I do now and if me and my sister, she's also a peer mediator, get into a conflict we both can figure it out."

When asked if they felt that being a peer mediator made any difference in their friendships (question number six) 7 out of 25 responses indicated that one difference in their friendships is that they now solve their problems better than they did before being a peer mediator. Eight out of 23 reported no changes while still another 8 reported that they were closer to their friends or had made more friends in mediation. See Figure 4.2 One student said that: "Now you don't have as many fights with each other and if you do (have a fight) you can solve them," and in another interview a student stated: "Before we

Figure 4.2
Differences In Friendships After Peer
Mediation Involvement



would argue and stuff but now we know what to do if we are fighting” stated another student. “I think that now that we can talk more and like work our problems out easier and we don’t get in as many conflicts I think as we did when we weren’t peer mediators,” another student told the interviewer.

Students were asked if they felt being a peer mediator had changed their relationship with their parents and 4 out of 24 stated that they felt they solved their conflicts better by using peer mediation and stated things like, “I think of the steps and how to work things out” and “It has sort of changed, we don’t like always like yell at each other and do stuff like that.” Twelve of 24 said they did not think their relationship with their parents had changed. Much of this seemed to be from the fact that many students didn’t report having much conflict with their parents (“Oh, I’m not in conflict with my parents”). Another possibility may be that students are taught to mediate other peers but not necessarily adults due to the power difference. See Table 4.2.

TABLE 4.2

Changes In Student Mediators' Relationship With Parents

<u>Changes</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
No Change	12	50%
Parents Proud	5	21%
Solve Problems Differently	4	17%
Get Along Better	1	4%
Parents Expect More	1	4%
More Freedom	1	4%
Totals	24	100%

When students were asked if they felt being a peer mediator affected their relationship with their siblings (interview question number eight) 10 out of 23 said it had not changed their relationship with their siblings while 13 out of 23 felt there had been some changes especially in how they solve their conflicts now. One student said, “Yes, because now I know how to handle it more, now I don’t yell at them as much and stuff. I talk to them.” Another student stated that she taught her sister the steps of peer mediation and many students felt that they knew when to stop an argument and leave now more than they did before. Of the ten who said being a peer mediator had not changed their relationship with their siblings many stated that their siblings still bother them, yet some did say, when asked, that they felt that sometimes they occasionally solved their problems differently, by talking more, now that they had been in mediation.

Fun

“ Well I thought it was kind of fun and it was pretty cool and it was, I just liked it.”-

Otsego Elementary peer mediator.

Throughout the data analysis process the theme of fun came up several times in many different interviews for a variety of questions. Students often stated directly and indirectly that peer mediation was fun and that it was one of many factors that keep them involved and made them feel as if it was a worthwhile use of their time. Often students would state that they enjoy helping others or solving problems and then say that peer

mediation was fun indicating that fun took a second seat behind helping others. If an activity is fun children tend to enjoy and look forward to the activity. When asked why they wanted to be a peer mediator (interview question number one) 6 out of 35 student responses stated that they felt it would be fun, "Mainly because I thought it might be fun and I could help people with their problems and "Well I thought it was kind of fun and it was pretty cool and it was, I just liked it." Three out of 32 indicated that the thing they liked most about mediation was that it was fun (interview question number three).

Subjects said: "You get out of class and get to play with a bunch of kids at recess if you were outside." Fun was also what 8 out of 23 peer mediators would tell another student about peer mediation (interview question number 13) and some students said that they would tell others that peer mediation was really fun and that he/she enjoyed it a lot.

Another student said: "Peer mediation is fun and you get to help kids solve their problems and it's just fun to go outside and play with the other kids." "I'd tell them that you learn a lot of stuff and that it's kind of fun helping out other kids," stated one student and yet another student said they would tell other students that: "I think it is really fun, because Mrs. Miller (facilitator) is a really good role model for all the students and she helps like many people with different problems." When asked if they would choose to be a peer mediator again next year (interview question number 12) 18 out of 23 responses indicated that the student would like to continue in peer mediation, 3 out of 18 said maybe, depending on their classes and how much schoolwork they would miss, and 2 out of 18 said they would not chose to continue due to feelings of being bored or too much frustration during peer mediation sessions that are not working well. Fun is one reason

students would chose to continue in peer mediation. One student said, "I just think it is fun," and another student said, "Because it is a lot of fun. You get to get out of class, get to stay after school, and they bring you on a field trip at the end of the year."

Another aspect of fun that was mentioned several times was that students felt they made more friends or got to know more people through their involvement in mediation, getting to know others was mentioned twice as an answer to what students liked about mediation (interview question number three) and talking and helping friends was mentioned once.

In interview question number six, how has peer mediation made a difference in your friendships, 8 out of the 25 responses indicated that the student felt closer or had more friends since joining peer mediation.

Impact of Peer Mediation in Schools

"I wanted to help people to not get in so many conflicts so we would have more of a peaceful school." - Rogers Elementary peer mediator.

Many of the themes of the data are closely intertwined and the topic of less violence in the schools is yet another example. Students often indicated that they liked to help people solve problem and therefore decrease the number of fights in their school. Some students really had a focus of making a difference in their school. Interview questions number one and number two, gathered some information about the reduction of violence from students. In question number one, 6 out of 35 student answers said that

they wanted to be a peer mediator to reduce the number of fights at their school and another student stated that he/she wanted to "Help the school." One subject said she wanted to be a peer mediator because, "Just to help people not get into so many conflicts, so we would have more of a peaceful school," and another said, "Because I like to help the school and I like to have this school a better place so people don't fight and stuff like that." When asked how they felt when they were chosen to be a peer mediator (interview question number two) two students mentioned that they had positive feelings because they knew they would be helping their school.

Interview question number 11 asked students if they felt differently about school now that they were in peer mediation. Eleven students out of 23 said that they did not feel any differently about school, with two students stated that their feelings towards school did not change and that they had always "felt highly about education," and "always liked school." One student skipped the question and 11 other students indicated they felt differently about school for a variety of reasons such as: feeling they were more involved (3 out of 11), they worked harder(2 out of 11), they watched their own behavior more closely (2 out of 11), looked forward to school (2 out of 11), felt happier(1 out of 11), and felt her/his friends looked up to her/him(1 out of 11). Some of their answers included "I feel like I am more involved in school and that I am helping my school," and another student stated that "I'm kind of more happier and I stay tuned to what's going on."

Drawbacks of Peer Mediation

“ It takes a lot of time out of my schedule. I have to come out of class to go and do mediations with other people, but I still enjoy doing it.” - Rogers Elementary peer mediator.

Students were asked if there were things they did not like about peer mediation in interview question number four and one student stated more than one thing he/she did not like and therefore there are 24 answers to this question. Five out of the 24 responses were that the peer mediator could think of nothing they did not like about peer mediation and 8 out of 24 responses indicated that students did not like it when peer mediation interfered with the student's work time, class instruction time, or homework time. One out of 24 responses indicated that he thought the peer mediators had too many meetings to attend, 3 out of 24 responses indicated they didn't like missing recess for meetings or to do mediations and another student stated that there was lots of work in learning the mediation process. Two mediators indicated that they didn't like it when the mediation didn't go smoothly, one student said it was boring, another student said he/she didn't get to do many mediations and two students stated that they received some teasing because they were involved in mediation. See Table 4.3.

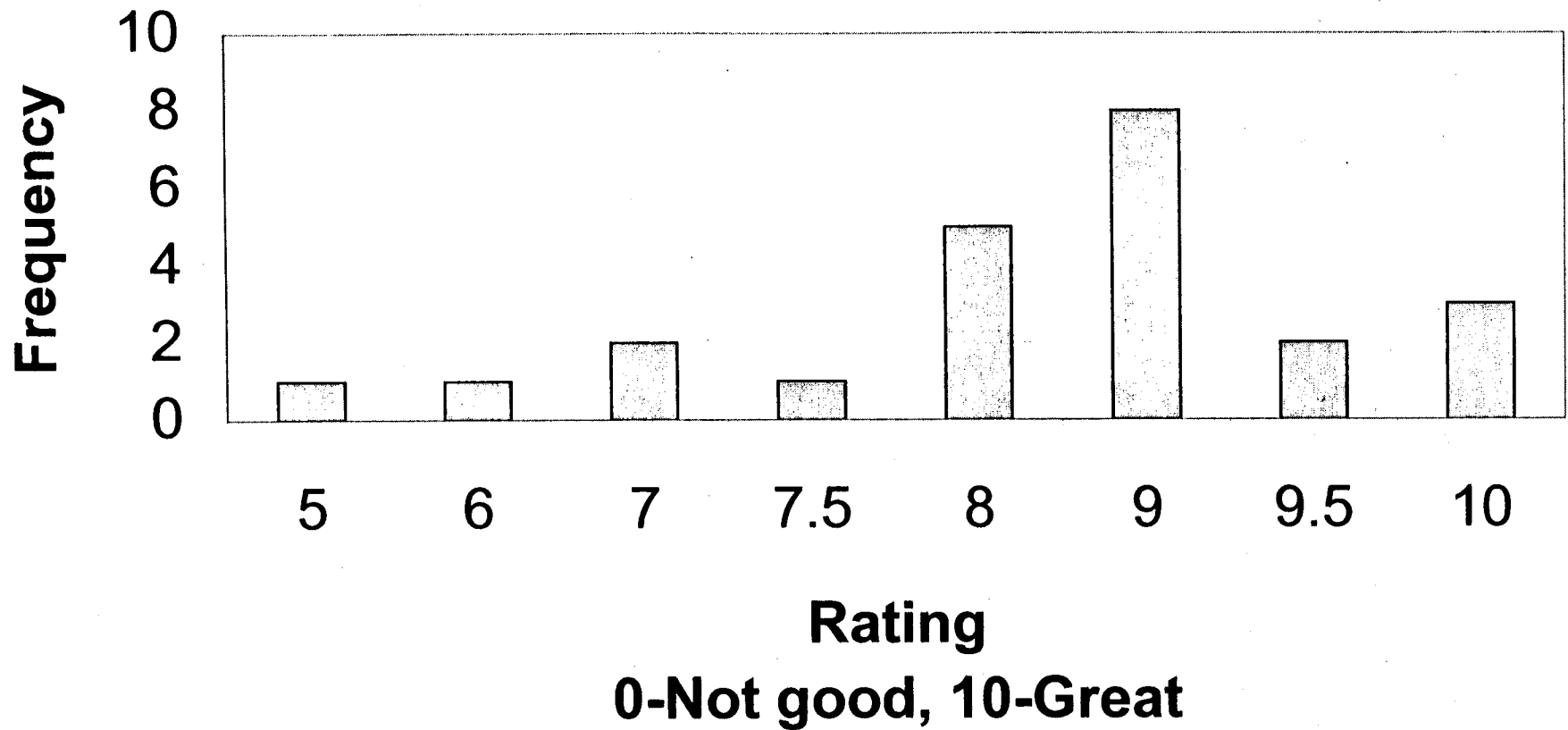
TABLE 4.3

Drawbacks Of Peer Mediation

<u>Drawbacks</u>	<u>Frequent</u>
Miss Class Time	
None	
Miss Recess	
Mediations Not Successful	
Teasing	
Too Many Meetings	
Boring	
Too Much To Learn	
Not Enough Opportunity	
Totals	

When students were asked to pick a number from a scale of 1 through 10, 1=not good, 10= great, to describe how they felt about being a peer mediator(interview question number 14), one student picked a five, one picked a six, two picked a seven, one picked a 7 or 8, five students said an eight, eight students chose a nine, one a nine and a half, another one chose a nine or ten, and three students chose ten. See Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3
Feelings About Being a Peer Mediator



These results indicate that on the average students felt good about peer mediation yet they still had some issues they viewed as drawbacks, one of the reasons that they chose the number they did were some problems with peer mediation which included difficulty solving some mediations, and mediation not being perfect. One student said she chose the response she did "Because it's not all in all perfect because there are some problems out there, but it is really good that you can solve those problems." Making up homework was another area where students felt their time spent in mediation had some drawbacks, "I like being a mediator but sometimes you have to make up homework and stuff too," stated one mediator. Lastly some students said that taking too much time away from classes that students enjoyed or felt they needed to be at was a drawback for them, "If you have to skip class time and you miss something that you can't go over again." Yet despite these drawbacks students still rated their feelings about being a mediator from average to a high degree of satisfaction.

Personal Gains and Self-Esteem

"I feel more important." - Elk River peer mediator.

The purpose of this thesis was to see how peer mediation affected the peer mediators involved in a program. Self-esteem is defined in this thesis as judgments, including thoughts and feelings, by an individual about the extent to which the self is good, capable, significant, and praiseworthy. Data that was gathered has shown by the reoccurrence of the theme of helping others that students feel helping others is important

and that they enjoy being able to have the chance to help others by being involved in peer mediation, they also feel that by learning more about conflict resolution and problem solving they are now capable of helping others solve conflicts as well as solve their own conflicts. In some cases students answered questions very clearly indicating a feeling of improved self-esteem, self-worth, goodness, significant, praiseworthy and capability for example, when asked if peer mediation had changed how they felt about themselves, one mediator stated that she/he felt more confident and another student said she/he felt proud of herself/himself. In other cases students did not state directly their feeling of improved self-esteem but alluded to it in their answers for example one student said that she didn't feel that peer mediation had changed how she felt about herself but also said that being a peer mediator makes her "feel better" while another student said that it just made him "feel good" to be a peer mediator. In several situations students answered questions and indicated they had made some personal gains. Following are some examples of these gains and increased self-esteem:

Students were asked how they felt about being selected to be a peer mediator (interview question number two). All 23 students described their feelings as positive and some students used more than one positive word to describe their feelings making a total of 29 responses for this question. See Table 4.4.

TABLE 4.4

How Students Felt About Becoming A Peer Mediator

<u>Feelings</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Good	9	33%
Happy	6	22%
Responsible	2	7%
Excited	2	7%
Important	2	7%
Great	1	4%
Glad	1	4%
Proud	1	4%
Special	1	4%
Lucky	1	4%
Cool	1	4%
Totals	27	100%

Many students said they felt good about being selected as a peer mediator (9/29) and still others used the word happy to describe their feelings (6/29). Two students indicated that they felt they would make school a better place, two other students said they felt important, and being excited was mentioned twice. Two more students responded that they felt they had more responsibility when they were chosen as a peer mediator, while other responses included one each of great, glad, proud, special, lucky, and cool.

The subjects were also asked if they felt that being a peer mediator had changed them in any way (interview question #5). Twenty-five responses were given and of these responses 17 were affirmative answers, one subject chose to skip the question and seven

subjects stated that they had not changed in any way. Of 17 affirmative responses students indicated that they felt they could solve their problems better (5/17), got into less trouble at school (6/17) Were able to get along better with their siblings and peers (3/17), were more helpful to others (2/17), were nicer (1/17), cared more about others (1/17), had learned to control his/her temper (1/17), and was a better person (1/17). See Table 4.5.

TABLE 4.5

How Peer Mediation Involvement Changed Students

<u>Changes</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
None	7	28%
Get Into Less Trouble	6	24%
Solve Problems Better	5	20%
Get Along With Siblings Better	2	8%
Care More	1	4%
Nicer	1	4%
Control Temper	1	4%
Better Person	1	4%
Skip	1	4%
Totals	25	100%

Some examples of the affirmative responses to the question: has being a peer mediator changed you in any way, are as follows:

“Yeah, I think I am a better person. I have not been getting into as much trouble as I had before.”

“ Yeah. I was always a little too wild and (peer mediation) kind of calmed me down a little bit. I learned a lot of stuff about how to handle and settle.”

“ Yeah, because I start to care about stuff like my friends and about other kids.”

In the interview question number nine, subjects were asked if peer mediation changed how they felt about themselves in any way. Twenty-six responses were given and of these twenty-one responses indicated that the subjects felt peer mediation had changed their feelings about themselves and five responses indicated that the subjects did not feel any changes occurred. In the subjects that said they felt no differently about themselves, one respondent explained that for him/her self-esteem had always been high saying, "No. I have always had high feelings about myself." Of the twenty-one responses in the affirmative subjects suggested that the changes included feeling better about themselves (6/21), feeling more responsible (2/21), feeling good about themselves (3/21), feeling more confident (5/21), being proud (1/21), feeling important (1/21), feeling more positive (1/21), being able to think more before becoming involved in conflict (1/21) and being more willing to try things (1/21). See Figure 4.4.

Some examples of the affirmative answers include:

"Yeah, I feel better about myself that I can help people."

"Yeah. I think more positive about myself."

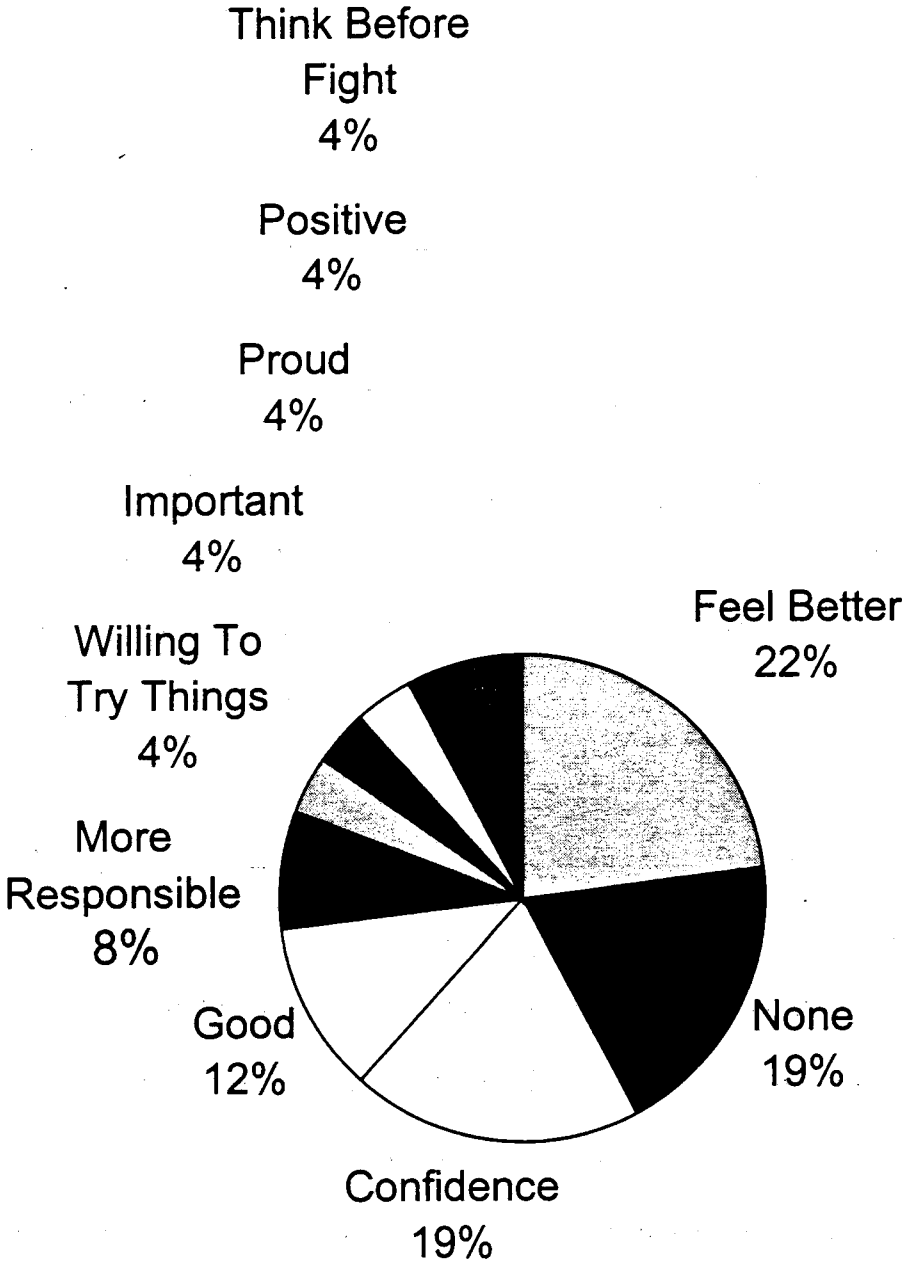
"A little bit. I feel more important."

"I feel proud of myself. Like I help a lot of people and we encourage people to do (peer mediation) so that there isn't as much fights around school."

"Yeah, it has given me more confidence I think to go out and try more things such as community education classes."

"Yeah. I think I am more confident now. I can speak out more, and, I know more about myself I think because I've, with helping other kids, it's just made me more

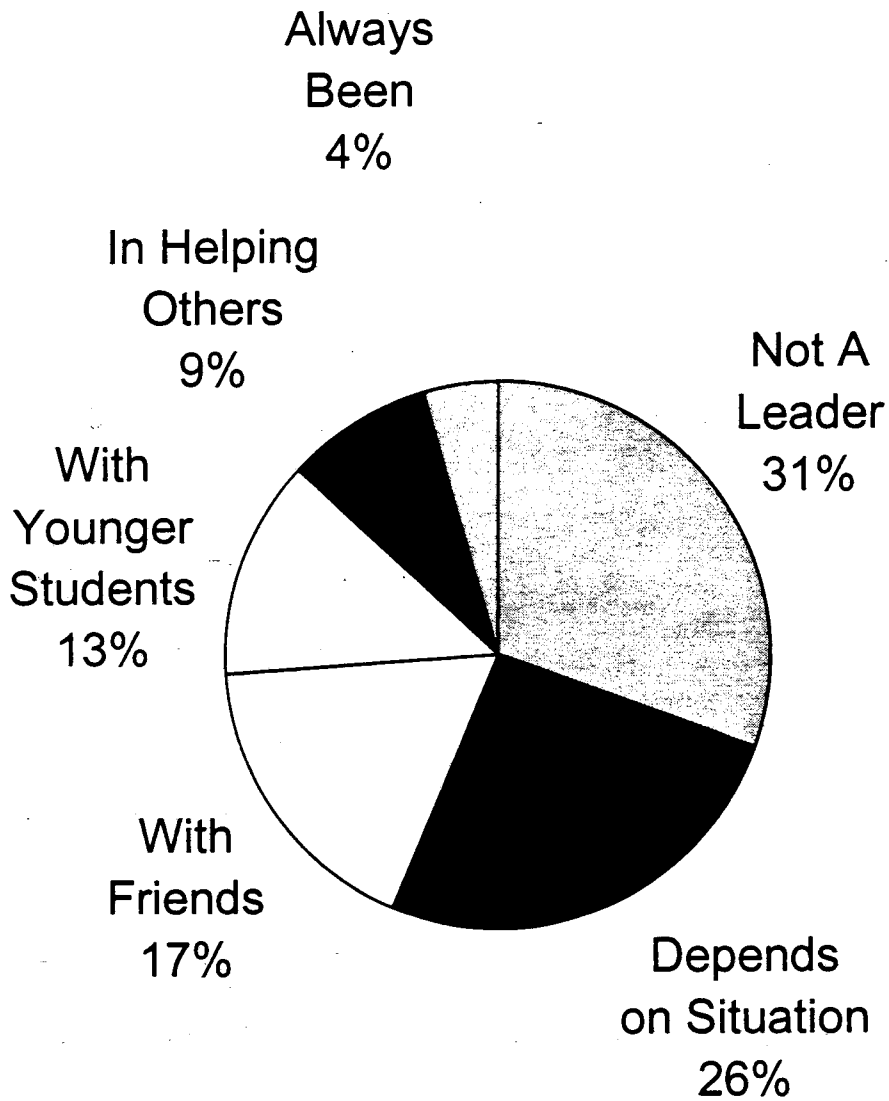
Figure 4.4
Changes In Self-Perception



confident.” When this student was asked why she felt peer mediation contributed to her learning more about herself she said, “I changed my mind about myself, because if there were some things I didn’t want to deal with in the past I’d put them out of my mind because I didn’t know how to deal with them but now I do.”

Students were also asked if they felt they were a leader (interview question number 10) in this question a definition of leader was not given unless the student needed a prompt. Of the twenty-three responses 10 subjects stated that they felt they were a leader, six subjects said it depended on the situation, and seven subjects said they did not feel they were a leader. See Figure 4.5. Of the ten students who felt they were a leader one student said “Yes, I like to lead. I never follow. I like to do my own thing.” When asked if mediation affected this student’s leadership skills the student stated, “Not really. I have always been a leader.” Other students indicated that peer mediation had affected their leadership skills because they felt they were a leader with their friends (4/10) “Well, if people like get into a fight, I just leave and my friends will just come with me,” and “Some of my friends look up to me now that I am more confident.” Other students indicated that they felt they were role models now especially with younger children (3/10) One student said that, “A lot of little kids actually follow the bigger kids, do what they do. So they think its all right if you fight and call names and (I’m a leader) by teaching them to do the right things, instead of doing the wrong things.” Other responses included, “ Well, people look up to you if you are a mediator and they will think that they will want to be a mediator.” “Because, you know, people kind of look up to you, because you’re the ones that helped them through their conflicts and stuff and it’s not that you don’t have conflicts

Figure 4.5
Students' View on Personal Leadership



though either.” Two other mediators indicated they felt they were leaders in helping people and said, “I’m a leader by helping people.”

Six subjects felt they were leaders depending on the situation one student described himself as a “sidekick” trying to help as much as he was capable of but not taking on the “whole entire thing.” Another student stated that in “Some cases yes, some cases no” and explained that with younger kids this student felt like a leader. Another student answered, “Not really. In a way maybe. Like I get to help these other kids to do better decisions, make better decisions.”

It was interesting that many students seemed to take the word leader and attribute a negative connotation to the word. Perhaps, for these students the word leader brought up memories of kids bossing or telling others what to do. One student said, “No. No one is better than anyone, it’s just everyone is different and no one’s better than anyone.” Another student indicated that since there was a lot of mediators not everyone was a leader saying, “Not really, because there’s a lot of other mediators.” For another student the word leader meant a more macro focus and this student said no he/she did not feel like a leader because, “...It’s just a program to help people, it’s not exactly like being the president or something.”

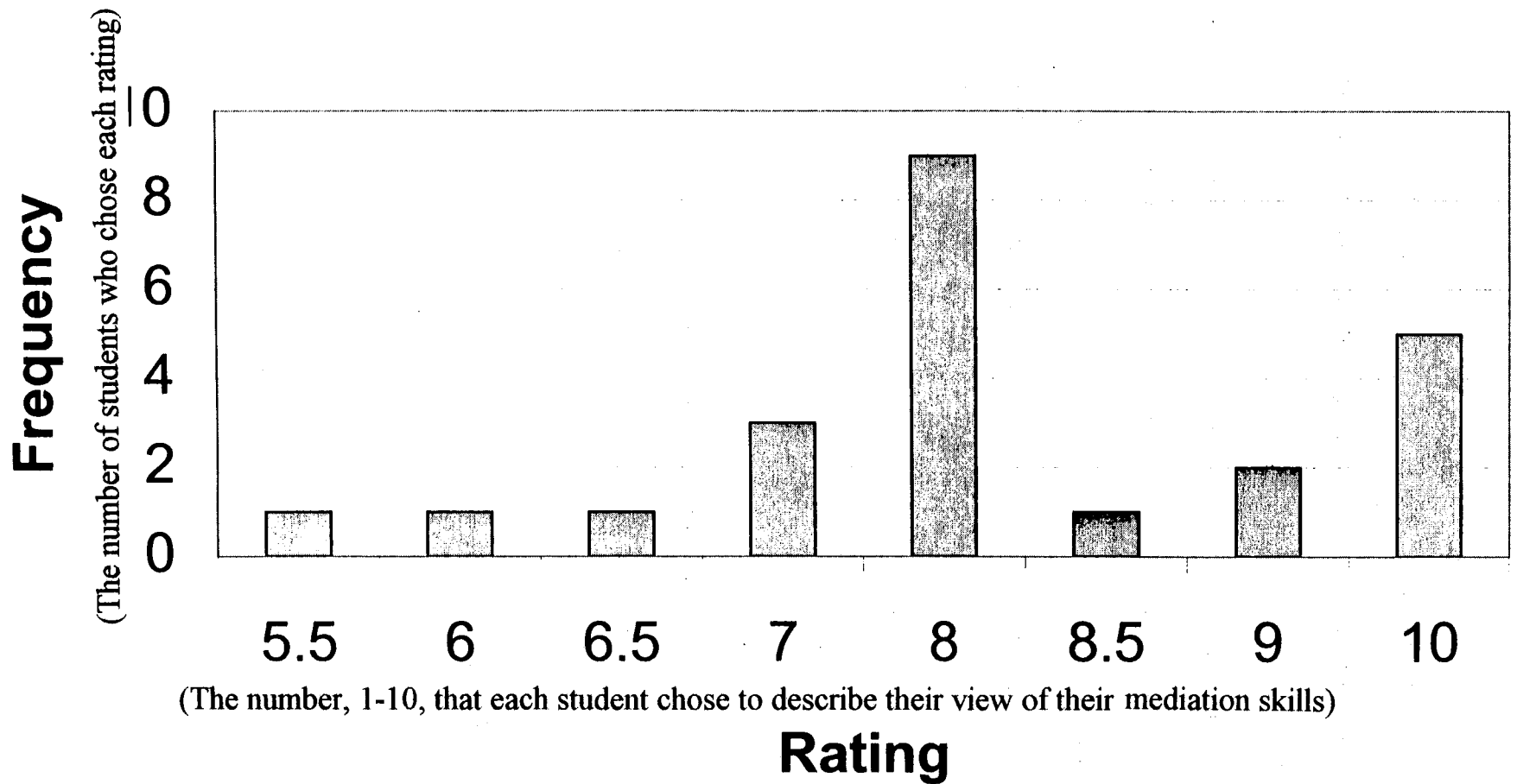
When students were asked to pick a number from a scale of 1 through 10, 1= not good, 10= great, to describe how they felt about being a peer mediator (interview question number 14), twenty three responses were gathered and one student picked a five, one picked a six, two others picked a seven, another student picked a seven or eight, five students said an eight, eight students chose a nine, another student chose a nine and a half,

one chose either a nine or ten but couldn't decide which, and three students chose tens. See Figure 4.6. These results indicate that on the average students felt good about peer mediation. Their explanations about why they chose the number they did consisted of the students pointing out some flaw in mediation as mentioned previously in the section about drawbacks of mediation, however with numbers of five and above and the majority of the answers being an eight or above, it indicates that the subjects feel highly about their peer mediation experience.

Question number 15 asked the students to rate how they felt about their mediation skills on a scale of one to ten, again with one being not good and ten being great. See Figure 4.6. Again students rated themselves quite highly with the lowest number being a "five or six" and several students choosing a ten (5/23) to describe their peer mediation skills. Two students chose a nine and nine students chose an eight, three chose a seven and one chose a six. Three students had a hard time deciding and chose two numbers such as a five or six, six or seven, or eight or nine. Students stated things such as "I have not had a lot of experience," and "Sometimes you forget things," and also "Because I'm not good at everything but I'm good at most of it," or "Because I am not as experienced as some" to answer why they chose numbers other than a ten. Of the students who chose a ten they stated things such as, "Because I can solve problems" and "Well, I have been in peer mediation two years now, so it kind of develops in your mind, puts more stuff into your mind and you learn it a lot better once you keep going through it in your mind."

When the subjects were asked if they would recommend peer mediation to their friends (interview question number 16) 19 subjects said they would recommend it, one

Figure 4.6
Self-Analysis of Mediation Skills



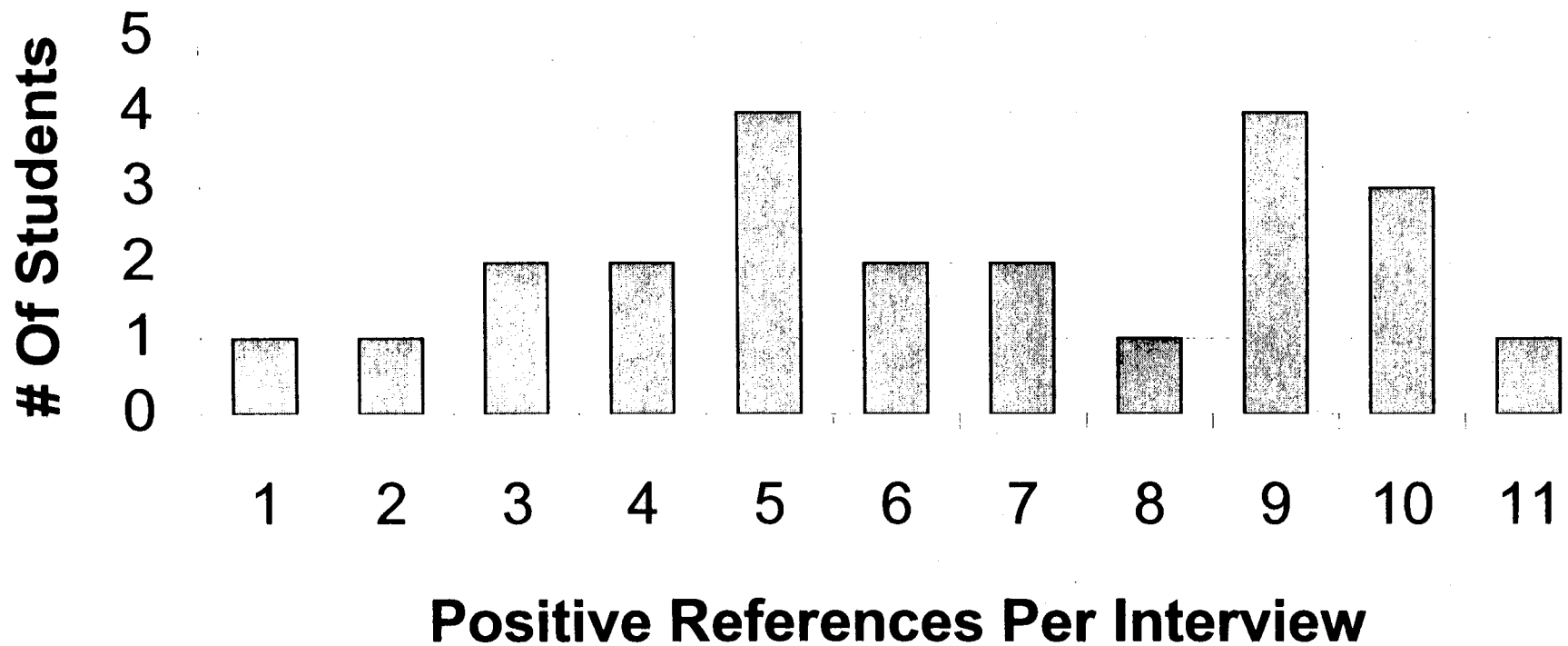
student said she would not and three more said it depended on the friend. This interview question was meant to find out if the students would recommend becoming a peer mediation to their friends however some students thought it meant would they recommend peer mediation for their friends to use if they had a conflict they could not solve. The researcher clarified that part of the question as a prompt after the first few interviews after several students misunderstood the question so some students' answers may not be as accurate to answer the question, if they would recommend being in peer mediation, as the researcher was hoping. Of those students who said they would recommend being in peer mediation many reasons students would recommend being a peer mediator had to do with personal gains. One student said she would recommend peer mediation to friends who would take time to be good at it and another students said he would recommend it because, "It just makes you feel good, you know, and it's fun." "It helps them solve their own problems if they have some," and "It's a good opportunity," were other answers students gave. Other students talked more directly about self esteem saying, "Yes, I would (recommend peer mediation). They might need a little help with themselves just thinking they are good and great because they might have low self-esteem and as soon as they get into mediation they might have a whole room full of self-esteem." Another student said, "Yeah. (he would recommend peer mediation), At least they know they are doing something (to help others), It doesn't matter what other people know or think. Just kind of good for yourself."

At the end of the interview students were all asked if they had anything else they wanted to share with me about peer mediation and again several students (7/23)

mentioned some personal benefits they received from the program stating things such as, “It’s just affected me like I’ve tried to be nicer and more caring about kids.” and “Um nothing besides how much you learn about yourself and it’s such a great opportunity and you get to, and you get to just help other kids,” and “I think it’s good for people they should try it at least once or become a become a peer mediator, not just for themselves, but for other people, so they can try to help other people and you know, it might make some people glad about you, you know, close people, maybe your parents or someone.”

Throughout the interviews students spoke positively about themselves and their abilities. In this research study self-esteem was operationalized as the number of times during the interview in which the student spoke positively about himself or herself and this ranged in these interviews from one time to twelve times during each interview which were each between seven and ten minutes in duration. The average number of times that students spoke positively about themselves was 7.26 (mean), the data was bimodal with subjects speaking positively about themselves for equal number of times of six times and ten times and the median was seven. This seems to indicate a relatively high number of self-esteem comments from the peer mediators. See Figure 4.7.

Figure 4.7
Self Esteem References Per Interview



Summary

The data from the interviews conducted in this research study includes several themes that emerged during the interviews which are:

- *helping others and the importance students placed on this;
- *learning more problem solving skills to use to help others and to use in their own conflicts;
- *the ability for the students to have fun while helping others;
- *the impact their involvement in peer mediation made on their school;
- *drawbacks of mediation;
- *personal gains by the student mediators such as increased self-esteem.

Of all the themes that emerged the most detailed and vivid were the themes of helping others, the learning of problem solving skills, and the personal gains, especially self-esteem, that mediators described, and these will be discussed further in the discussion chapter that follows. The next chapter will also further discuss the data gathered in this study and its' implications for social workers and future research as well as state limitations to this study.

ANALYSIS

Overview

This research study explored the question of how being a peer mediator impacts the mediators themselves, especially in the areas of self esteem, relationships, leadership and school perception. The following chapter will explore implications of the results in each of the above areas as well as address any other impacts discovered throughout the research. The themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview data will be discussed under the section of the research question in which they seem to answer. A discussion of the implications for social work will follow as well as the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research.

Self-Esteem

When studying the results from the interviews with the student mediators it does appear that peer mediation has an impact on a peer mediator's self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined in this study as: judgments, thoughts and feelings by an individual about the extent to which the self is good, capable, significant and praiseworthy (Berg, L., 1991). Twenty-one out of twenty-six responses gathered to the interview question that asked students if being a peer mediator had changed how they felt about themselves were answers in the affirmative. Five students indicated that they felt their experience had not

mediation had an impact on various dependent variables. Many programs have not measured their impact on students or the school, and independent variables that are part of peer mediation and therefore a part of the study, are not defined at all. All of these things make it hard to research or provide accurate conclusive data.

Methodological problems include studies with high external validity but low internal validity, for example many studies did not randomly assign subjects or subjects were nonrepresentative of the population. Nevertheless, there are reasons that the study of peer mediation has many problems, and these reasons include lack of resources such as money, time, materials and assistance as well as validity issues due to historical and developmental and natural maturation factors in children. However, the wide range of topics that have been researched, and the variety of methodologies and settings which have been used in many different research studies, also have added some strength and generalizability to the research.

Summary

Peer mediation literature and conflict resolution literature are woven together in many studies. The history of peer mediation came from the desire to encourage peace from many people including educators, social workers, activists and lawyers starting in the 1960's. Accompanied with this need for peace was the recognition that children needed to learn about peaceful conflict resolution and peer mediation became a part of conflict resolution in 1985. Many schools have a group of students trained as peer mediators who

help their peers resolve conflicts and these programs have changed the way students solve their problems. As discussed in this chapter, students trained as peer mediators have gained skills in problem solving, regulating their own behavior and other important interpersonal relationship skills, and in some studies these skills were shown to transfer to other settings the students were involved in. Mediation also empowers students in terms of giving them more responsibility for their actions and more knowledge and choices about resolving conflicts. Research on the impact of mediation and school climate and research on self-esteem of mediators is inconsistent. Much of the peer mediation research has validity concerns and lacks supporting data to the claims that are made, therefore future research is warranted in many different research aspects of peer mediation.

The following research study was conducted in order to explore the areas of student mediator's own perceptions of mediation, their self-esteem, and school climate, all areas that were in need of further investigation. The study will be a qualitative design and will gather in-depth information from the students themselves about peer mediation. Data gathering methods will include interviewing student mediators in three different elementary schools in the Elk River School District. As identified in chapter one, the research question that is being explored is: How does being a peer mediator affect mediators in terms of their self-esteem, leadership skills, relationships and school perception? The following chapter details the theoretical framework of this research study.

Theoretical Framework

Established theory is an important reference point of any research study that is completed. Theory provides a guideline, a framework on which to base the analysis of data and provides a link between past and present research. The following pages will examine theories which make up the conceptual framework of this project and which are also evident in previous research in peer mediation. These theories include psychosocial theory, cooperative learning, conflict theory, empowerment and social learning theory. Psychosocial theory and cooperative learning theory are being used the most in this research study's framework.

Psychosocial Theory

As stated by Berk:

“Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory states that an individual goes through important stages in his or her life. Each stage contributes to developing a unique personality for that individual and at the same time helps the individual become a part of society. Each stage can have a positive or a negative outcome that characterizes the course of development” (Berk, 1991).

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory has eight stages and each stage has a specific period of development. These stages consist of a series of basic psychological conflicts each of which is resolved through accomplishing tasks along a continuum from positive to negative outcome. These stages are: Basic Trust vs Mistrust, age birth to one year, Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt, ages one to three years, Initiative vs Guilt, ages three to six years, Industry vs Inferiority, six years to puberty, Identity vs Identity Diffusion, this is during adolescence, Intimacy vs Isolation, which is in young adulthood, Generativity vs Stagnation, in middle adulthood, and Ego Integrity vs Despair, in old age.

According to Erikson, children between the ages of six and puberty are completing the Industry Vs Inferiority stage. In this stage children are developing insight into what kind of people they can become and are developing their ability to work alone and cooperatively with a group. In their adolescence they will enter the Identity Vs Identity diffusion stage where their task is to develop a lasting sense of identity and societal place but this task does not always work out positively for all children.

Peer mediation, in this study, involves children in upper elementary school in grades five and six who are either nearing the end of the industry Vs inferiority stage or are in the Identity Vs Identity diffusion stage. When introduced to peer mediation at this age, children can incorporate what they learn about responsibility, choices and interpersonal relationships into their stage of development. Learning to work cooperatively benefits a child's growth in the Industry vs. Inferiority stage of development and they can use this information to help inform themselves of the type of people they can become. Forming their identity is a process of self-discovery and their experiences will

help them to shape their identity in society (Wilkerson, Protinsky, Maxwell, & Lentner, 1982). Erikson's work is helpful in bringing around this way of identifying the tasks of childhood and is used in this research. However criticisms such as it being so strongly committed to the clinical approach that it fails to acknowledge other methods, relying on subjective information, and the vagueness of several concepts, are also recognized.

Cooperative Learning

The concept of "Cooperative learning" includes a wide range of strategies that promote academic learning through peer cooperation and communication (Sharan & Sharan, 1987). In cooperative learning students share ideas, work together on projects and plan their method to study a problem. Teachers who use cooperative learning allow for the flexibility of each group of students to choose to follow a different method to solve a problem or complete a project. Communication skills are vital to cooperative learning and students need to learn how to communicate their thoughts and ideas to their peers not unlike the adult work world where these exact skills are used daily. Cooperative learning encourages the participation of all students in the group and the process that students go through to solve a problem is just as important as the product. Cooperative learning promotes a greater effort to achieve retention of information, to utilize higher reasoning skills and to promote positive relationships between students (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

Peer mediation is also a process about cooperation and working towards a goal. The trend of cooperative learning is one of the reasons that peer mediation became popular because it included cooperative learning in the disciplinary part of school (Tolson, McDonald, & Moriarty, 1992). Cooperative learning establishes a context in which students can resolve problems constructively. In Peer mediation students are given the opportunity to use their communication and group cooperation skills to resolve conflicts (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). The process of mediation is inherently democratic, students are trained to resolve conflicts under an assumption of a collective responsibility to reach an agreement (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991). Mediation is compatible to cooperative learning in theory and technique (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991).

Conflict Theory

In conflict theory, conflict is defined as “an incompatibility of behaviors, cognition (including goals), and/or affect among individuals or groups that may or may not lead to an aggressive expression of this social incompatibility” (Horowitz & Boardman, 1995). While conflict may be both destructive or constructive aggression usually refers to only destructive conflict. Constructive conflict is an important part of learning and promotes healthy psychological growth as well as influencing everyday goals (Horowitz & Boardman, 1995). Conflict theory states that the two major concerns when resolving a conflict include: concerns about reaching a goal and concerns about maintaining an appropriate relationship with another individual involved (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). The

way a person chooses to resolve a conflict is determined by the degree of importance the goal or relationship has to the individual. Being taught positive conflict resolution skills helps students to find a way to solve a conflict when the goal and relationship are both important. Thus peer mediation is designed to offer a positive way for students to resolve their conflicts. Conflict theory is a theory that is woven into the very core of peer mediation.

Empowerment

Empowerment can be defined on many levels. At the micro level empowerment is the recognition and use of personal power by an individual which is enhanced by the actions of a professional (Link, 1995). Empowerment at the mezzo level involves promoting a process of dialogue, questioning, curiosity, reflection and action, while empowerment at the macro level involves challenging oppression and questioning institutional and structural issues in society (Link, 1995). In this research study empowerment is viewed mainly on a micro level and can be defined as promoting the realization and use of personal power by the students as encouraged in the mediation process with hopes that the students will enter the mezzo level of empowerment and begin to reflect and question different situations. As discussed later in this thesis, student mediators themselves recognize the many different dimensions of peer mediation and empowerment. Some student mediators focus on their ability to empower others on a micro level and concentrate on the impact of peer mediation on individuals, while other

mediators focus on empowering the entire student body through mediation, which is mediation at a mezzo level and yet other mediators are more aware of empowerment on the macro level, and reflect on how mediation could affect themselves, others, community, their school, and their country as a whole.

Empowerment is a large part of peer mediation and conflict resolution programs. Students are given the skills they need to start developing their use of positive conflict resolution and are encouraged to utilize their skills and the process of mediation when a conflict arises. Peer mediation allows students to be actively involved in resolving their conflicts thus empowering them which is an important part of self-esteem (Maxwell, 1989). In peer mediation students are viewed as being competent and able to resolve their own issues and to assume responsibility (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991). Students are given the chance to develop as they become more responsible (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991). Empowerment of individuals is important but empowerment through peer mediation also has an educational nature. It helps students to learn to identify their own needs, their interests and reactions to conflicts, along with reinforcing the idea that each individual is responsible for their own solutions and resolutions to conflicts. In several of the studies performed on mediation, empowering students was noted as an important part of peer mediation and appeared to be a large part of why students use mediation (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991; Stomfay-Stitz, 1994; Parsons, 1991; Maxwell, 1989).

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory assumes that children are molded by social environment to learn what is right and wrong for them to do (Meyers, 1986). Modeling is a large part of how children learn how to act. Albert Bandura and colleagues performed an extensive number of investigations that demonstrated that modeling is the basis for a wide variety of children's behavior such as aggression, and helping (Berg, 1991). Bandura also stated that children's cognitive ability to listen, remember and follow abstract rules affect their imitation of behaviors.

Children have learned how to resolve their conflicts by modeling what they see in their environment. Peer mediation programs allow students to see another positive way to resolve their conflicts in the school. The more students learn about or use the peer mediation system, the more exposure they have to a positive problem solving approach to conflicts and they also see that adults have some trust in the student's ability to solve conflicts. As adults in the school environment accept peer mediation and model the use of mediation or encourage its use, the students also begin to accept peer mediation as a positive alternative.

Summary

Theory is an important part of research. In peer mediation research, psychosocial theory helps to define the developmental stage that students are in. By examining psychosocial theory the impact mediation skills can have on the identity development of students can be assessed. Another theory, cooperative learning, is the base of mediation. Cooperative learning stresses the importance of students working together, using problem solving skills, and developing their own independence in decision making. Mediation also promotes these skills and is a process of learning and working together and communicating with each other to solve a conflict. A third theory, conflict theory, points out that conflict can be both good and bad and how a conflict is solved depends on the degree of importance the goal and relationship have to the individuals involved. Peer mediation gives students another positive way to solve conflicts when the goal and relationship are both important. The empowerment model, another important piece of the conceptual framework of this study, shows how important people's strengths are. In peer mediation students are given the power to utilize their strengths to resolve conflict. Lastly, social learning theory points out that children model what they see. They determine how to act through watching others. Peer mediation programs allow both older students and adults to model positive conflict resolution skills to younger students.

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter will outline the planning, design, implementation and data analysis steps taken in this research study under the headings: research design, study population and sample, data collection, protection of subjects, data analysis, and validity and reliability. In the section describing data collection some examples of the questions on the interview guide, the data collection tool, will be given to give the reader an idea of the questions that were asked. In the appendix the reader can find a complete interview guide that lists all of the questions the researcher asked the subjects during the interview.

Research Design

This research study was an exploratory study looking at mediation's impact on the student mediators themselves. The study used a qualitative design to attempt to obtain the most thorough in-depth information possible, and inductive reasoning was the design conceptual framework. Data were collected from student mediators about their perceptions of peer mediation and its impact on their lives, relationships, and self-esteem. Qualitative information was gathered through twenty-three semi-structured interviews with subjects in the study. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions related to self-esteem, relationships and leadership skills, and all of the interviews were taped and

transcribed for data analysis purposes. Patterns in the responses were identified and coded systematically by categories under each question. The transcribed data were in a format where all twenty-three answers to a question were listed together and from there the researcher sorted data into key words that emerged by writing key phrases on individual pieces of paper. This process helped the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the impact of mediation on the mediators.

The Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of twenty-three elementary school students between the ages of 10 and 13 years old, both males and females and of any race and social class. The students in the study population had to have received training in peer mediation and been involved in a peer mediation program for at least six months. The location of the study was in the Elk River School System which is about 30 miles north of Minneapolis and encompasses the cities of Rogers, Otsego, Elk River and Zimmerman. There are seven elementary schools in the district which range in student population size from 850 to 300 students, four of which currently have peer mediation programs. The subjects were from three different elementary schools in the Elk River School District. These three schools were chosen because they currently had mediation programs in progress and the principals were willing to allow the researcher to interview students in their school. The social workers who ran the mediation programs were also a factor in

choosing the three schools in the study because they were willing to identify possible subjects, send consent forms home, collect consent forms, and help set up the interviews.

A sample was obtained from the above population with all participants being between 10 and 13 years old, trained in mediation, and had six months of involvement in a peer mediation program. The subjects were identified by school social workers in the Elk River School District through peer mediation program data. Once the subjects who meet these qualifications were identified, ten subjects at each of the three school sites were selected by the school social workers who facilitate the peer mediation programs by using purposeful sampling. Facilitators were asked to choose students who would represent the average student in the peer mediation program in a process of typical case sampling. This information was given orally to the social workers by the researcher. The researcher's notes in the oral discussion include: the average student is described as one who does not stand out as being the perfect mediator and student, but also not one who is in need of more training or who lacks ability in peer mediation. In retrospect written requests could have been used to assure exactly the same definition to all facilitators. The purpose for selecting "typical" peer mediators is to gain a sample that is fairly representative of most students in peer mediation. Information was given to parents and participants regarding the study (see appendix), and those interested returned a consent form or a request for further information to the researcher. If further information was requested, the researcher would have contacted the student and their family personally; however in this study no requests for further information were received by the researcher. The interview questions were given to the participants ahead of time with the consent form to allow the subjects

time to think of answers and to feel less anxious about the interview. At the time of the interview each student was given a copy of the consent form signed by them, their parent and the interviewer; each student was also assured of their rights to anonymity and of their right to skip a question or withdraw from the study at any time and without consequences (see consent letter).

Data Collection

Before any data were collected, the approval for this study had to be obtained from the Director of Elementary Education for the Elk River School District along with the principals of each of the schools involved and the Augsburg Internal Review Board. After all parties involved approved this study; consent forms were given to the school social workers who were identified subjects in regards to the sample criteria and then sent out the consent forms to the sample group. Twenty-five consent form were returned to the researcher and twenty three students were interviewed; one student was ill on the day of the interviews, and one consent form was returned after the interviews had taken place. Informed parental consent as well as the student's consent was gathered beforehand, to protect the subjects who were under age to give their informed consent. Each interview was conducted in a private location in the school the child attended during the school day, in the social work office in two schools and in an empty room next to the social work office in the third school.

The data collection instrument was administered by the researcher and the subjects were asked seventeen questions in a private setting with the understanding that the researcher would like to know more about their involvement in the peer mediation program and how it has affected them. The same wording was used with all students and the interview guide was pre-tested on students who fit the criteria of the sample but who were not in the study. Four students pre-tested the original data collection tool. Due to time constraints and other factors such as scheduling difficulties, all four students pre-tested at the same time in a focus-group type format. After the pretest, the researcher gathered concerns, comments or suggestions about the collection tool and made the necessary changes. The researcher then compared the pre-tested answers with the research question to ensure that the data collection tool was valid.

The following are a few samples of the interview questions the researcher asked the student subjects to answer in order to gather information for the study, please see the appendix for the full study instrument:

*Do you feel peer mediation has changed you in any way?

*Has being a peer mediator changed how you feel about yourself?

*Would you describe yourself as a leader?

*How has peer mediation made a difference in your friendships?

*Do you feel differently about school now that you are involved in peer mediation? Can you explain how you feel different?

Twenty three subjects were interviewed in a period of three school days, May 15th, 18th, and 19th, 1998, and each interview took between seven and fifteen minutes. Before each interview started the researcher introduced herself, explained the study and the procedure for the interview explaining that the researcher would be audio-taping their interview so the data would be accurate and asking their verbal permission for the researcher to do this. The subjects were also informed of their right to skip any question or withdraw or stop the study at any time as well as their right to receive a summary of the results of the study in the fall when the study was completed. The students were asked if they had any questions or concerns about anything before the interview started. After the researcher asked all of the questions on the interview guide, the researcher stopped the audio tape and thanked the student for coming, as well as answering any questions that the subject had after the interview; each subject was also informed of who the social worker in their school was in case they felt the need to talk.

Protection of Subjects

The first protection of the subjects was to gather informed consent where all subjects were asked to join only after they have learned what will happen and parental consent was obtained for the children. The study was explained in a letter addressed to the students and their parents, and all individuals interested returned either a consent form or a request for more information. Informed consent was obtained at this time, and a copy of the signed form was given to the participants at the time of the interview. Included

with the letter and consent form, a copy of the research questions was given to students so they knew what would be asked of them. All participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time or to choose to skip any question. Participation was voluntary, and there was not any outside academic or personal pressures to be part of this study. When the student came into the interview, the researcher again went over a brief explanation of the study and asked if the student has questions before the interview starts. The researcher also explained that the student could stop the interview at any time.

The second protection of the subjects was the rule that there will be no harm to the participant. The researcher followed this rule by making sure the name of the school social workers available was given in the consent form and also in the interview to all participants. Parents were encouraged to talk with their children after the interview and explore any topics that seemed troubling to the child, and peer mediation facilitators also allowed any students who would like to talk about the interview the opportunity to do so in their mediation group. Since interviews were being done, anonymity from the researcher and the school social worker could not be guaranteed, but anonymity in the final report, however, can be ensured. Participants and their parents were informed on the consent form and in the interview of the anonymity issue and the fact that participants' names were not used in the final report. All documents were kept in a locked file cabinet, and all findings, both positive and negative, were reported..

Data Analysis

The information collected through the interview process was in the form of descriptive data. All of the interviews were taped and the tapes were then transcribed, organized by the interview questions. Next, the researcher used content analysis which is useful to detect any bias, making inferences from the text, reflecting patterns, and revealing the focus of the individual or group. This process was helpful in classifying open ended question text into smaller, manageable categories in which recording units were defined and the researcher looked for themes that emerged. A test code was done on a sample of the text by listing all of the answers to a single question together and then highlighting common phrases or words, then the researcher labeled individual pieces of paper with the key phrases or words and then listed the answers that fit under each phrase or word. In some instances the answer fit under several key words and thus the researcher recorded it as a multiple response. The researcher assessed accuracy and reliability of the coding process by comparing the test code of the sample text with two other peers who read several questions and picked out key phrases and words that they saw. The researcher and peers agreed on the coding rules before all of the information was coded.

Validity and Reliability

Internal validity as used in this study refers to the validity of a causal inference; it is addressed in this study in several different ways. This study interviewed students from three different schools to produce a form of data triangulation. By talking with students

from different schools, the researcher recognizes that the subjects will all have slightly different experiences. Taking a sample that may differ slightly will help control for the impact of external factors, such as a particular facilitator, when addressing the research questions. Also, the narrow age range helps to reduce issues of natural maturing enhancing a student's problem solving skills. Audio taping each interview is also a form of internal validity that will ensure that the researcher has the exact words of a subject when analyzing the data. Social desirability bias is a threat to validity as is selection bias.

Reliability can be defined for the purpose of this study as the replication of this study by others, and is addressed both in the interview process and the data analysis process. In the interview, the researcher used a semi-structured guide, including prompts, when asking the questions to ensure that the researcher asked the same questions to the students. In data analysis, consistency through coding is important for reliability. The process described above calls for internal checks with peers to make certain the researcher is using a system that is consistent. The following chapter will describe the findings of the interviews and data analysis.

FINDINGS

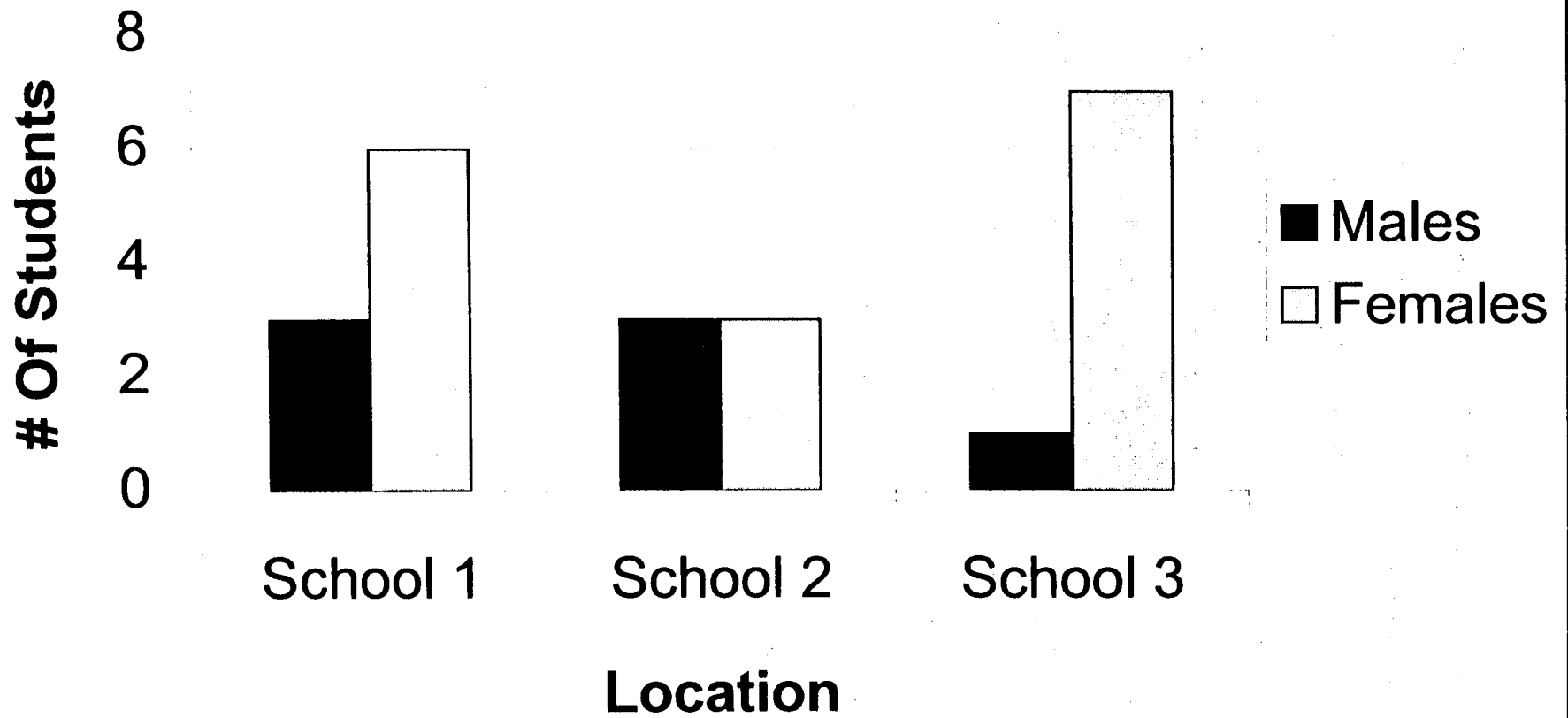
Overview

This chapter presents the information gathered in the interviews of 23 fifth and sixth grade peer mediators, 15 females and 8 males, in three elementary schools in the Elk River school district, see figure 4.0.

The interview questions, a total of 17, were designed to explore the question of how being a peer mediator affect student mediators in terms of their self-esteem, relationships, leadership skills and school perceptions. The open-ended questions asked during the interviews gave the subjects the opportunity to answer the questions in their own words not pre-selected choices, keeping the interviews as personal for each person as possible. The only descriptive data about the subjects that was gathered was their gender as other information was not pertinent and would make identifying the subject easier with the small sample, thus interfering with anonymity and confidentiality of the subjects. This chapter is divided into themes that became apparent throughout the analysis of the transcribed interviews, these themes are:

- * helping other people
- * solving problem skills
- * fun
- * impact on school
- * personal gains
- * drawbacks of peer mediation

Figure 4.0 Study Population



In many cases the subjects gave a multiple answer to each question therefore much of the following data will indicate how often (frequency) that a specific answer was given by the students throughout the 23 interviews thus the number of answers for any given question may total more than the 23 subjects.

Helping Other People

What I liked best about mediation was... " helping people solve their problems and knowing that I helped them." - Zimmerman Elementary Peer Mediator

In many of the interview questions students responses indicated that helping others was important to them and a major factor in their experience as a peer mediator. In question number one, students were asked why they want to become a peer mediator, and the answer, "to help other people," was mentioned 11 different times out of 35 responses as one reason students wanted to join. When asked why he wanted to become a peer mediator one student said, "So I could help kids with their problems and help them solve them because some people can't solve them and then they just go into big fights." Another student answered, "I wanted to help people get through their conflicts." Some students indicated specifically that they wanted to help their friends or the school. When asked why she wanted to become a mediator a student answered, "To help people and my

friends or anyone that has a problem.” An additional 7 times out of 35, subjects answered that they specifically wanted to help others solve their problems, “I wanted to become a peer mediator because I like to help people when they have problems and I just thought it would be really fun and interesting thing to do.” Overall helping others in some capacity, solving problems, helping the school, or helping others, was mentioned 21 different time out of 35 responses for this interview question. Please See Table 4.1.

TABLE 4.1

Reasons Students Wanted To Be Peer Mediators

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Help Others	11	31%
Solve Problems	7	20%
Fun	6	17%
Reduce Fights	1	3%
Fill Time	5	14%
Help School	2	6%
Good Opportunity	1	3%
Solve Own Problems	2	6%
Totals	35	100%

Helping other people in some way was also mentioned 16 different times when students were asked what they liked about peer mediation (interview question number three). Answers to this question included: "Helping people solve their problems and knowing that I helped them," and "That I can help people solve their problems if they need me to," and also "I liked helping people." Many students stated that helping people was something they really liked and indicated that they felt good about being able to do this. See Figure 4.1.

When asked if they felt peer mediation had changed them in any way (interview question number five), 2 out of 28 students stated: "I think I am more helpful," and "I feel like I help more people now that I do this." In another question (interview question number 13) students were asked what they would tell another student about peer mediation. The theme of helping others again became apparent and was mentioned 4 out of 25 different times by the students, the students stated that they would tell others that peer mediation was "...fun and you get to help kids solve problems and it's just fun to go outside and play with other kids." (Some peer mediators had mediation duty outside on the playground with the younger students.) Another student said he would tell others, "That it would be better to help other people than try and get into fights a lot."

In interview question number 16 students were asked if they would recommend peer mediation to their friends, 19 out of 23 said they would and an additional 3 said it depended on which friend they were talking to. Of the 19 who said they would recommend peer mediation three subjects gave answers that dealt with helping other

changed their self-perception and one of these five stated that she already had a high self-esteem before joining peer mediation and that is why she felt no change had occurred. The 21 positive responses were all answers indicating that some change in the way they felt about themselves had occurred while they participated in peer mediation. Several factors in the peer mediation program can contribute to self-esteem in the subjects. Due to the fact that it was not possible to do before and after interviews with the students, the researcher could not compare the self-esteem of each subject before and after their involvement in a peer mediation program, but had to rely on the self-reporting of each student as to how they perceive the impact of being a mediator on themselves. Most students were measured as talking positively about themselves on the average of seven times. This means that during a short interview a student was able to identify and express ideas about themselves positively almost every minute. Some subjects were very direct and indicated specifically that they felt their self esteem was improved by being involved in peer mediation saying things like, "I am more proud of myself and I can trust myself more now," and "I feel better about myself now." Other students indicated that they felt better or good about themselves because they were able to help others or themselves with conflicts and said things such as, "Well, I feel that helping people makes me feel good and the responsibility is sort of good I think." When reviewing this set of responses it is clear that the experience of being a peer mediator is very healthy for the majority of the peer mediators and in fact impacts the mediator's self-esteem and self-perceived worth positively.

Throughout their involvement in a peer mediation program students were given experiences in which they could choose to use to build their self-esteem with one of the first situations being the actual act of being chosen to be a peer mediator and several students mentioned feeling “lucky” or being excited that they had been chosen. Being chosen to participate in something, especially when others are not chosen, gave the students a chance to feel proud and significant which in turn can be applied to their feelings of self-worth. According to Erickson’s psychosocial theory, these students are in or nearing the identity formation stages and are in the process of determining their self-worth and their role and place in society. When students are chosen to be a peer mediator it gives the students the message that they were viewed by others as capable and deserving members of the school community, which in turn helps them to form their own opinions about themselves.

In the interviews students talked a lot about the themes of helping others and learning how to solve conflicts and the students were happy about the fact that they desired to help others and felt good when they were able to help others. One student said that when he was chosen to be a peer mediator “ It felt pretty good knowing that I am going to help some people with their problems.” It appears that many of the students were interested in finding a way to help other individuals because they felt it was something they should do and because it made them feel “good”. These are values that these students have been taught and have likely been modeled in their lives and as they struggle to determine their own place in society they are finding opportunities to practice the things they have been shown or taught. Peer mediation gives students the chance to help in their

schools by giving the students the tools and direction to help others by being involved in a peer mediation program where they are taught the skills of problem solving, engaged in the exact steps to use in mediation sessions, given chances to practice these skills and eventually called upon to help other students with the skills they learned. Students also learned how to solve their own conflicts and were given the message that the adults in charge of the program felt they were able and capable of this task. This is empowering for students. Empowerment theory tells us that people benefit from being given the message that they are capable of doing something and peer mediation by the very fact that students are taught to resolve conflicts amongst themselves gives this message to mediators and in turn contributes to a student's self-concept and self-esteem. Empowerment promotes the realization and use of personal power and peer mediation gives the student mediator the tools and therefore the power to help others and themselves with their conflicts. Although no specific interview question was asked to assess each student's emotional involvement in the mediation program the interview answers seemed to correlate that the students who talked enthusiastically about the program and who appeared to be very involved seemed to use more self-esteem laden answers in the interview than those who were not as invested or as enthused in the program. An example of this is one student who said she no longer enjoyed peer mediation and would not do it again because it was not as fun as she thought it would be. This student also used the least amount of self-esteem positive comments while another student who talked about teaching her parents and family about peer mediation and was very enthused, used positive self-esteem comments the most. See figures 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, and 4.11.

Visualization of the correlation between a student's personal involvement in peer mediation and the use of self-esteem laden answers in the interview.

Figure 4.8

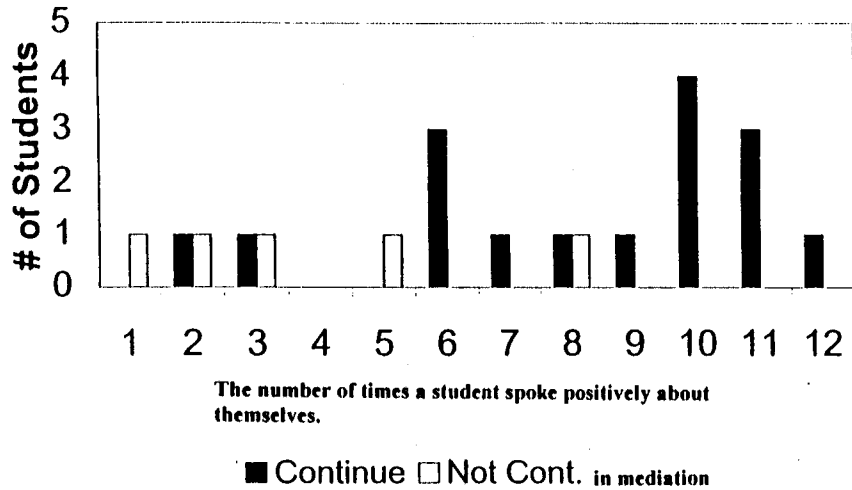


Figure 4.9

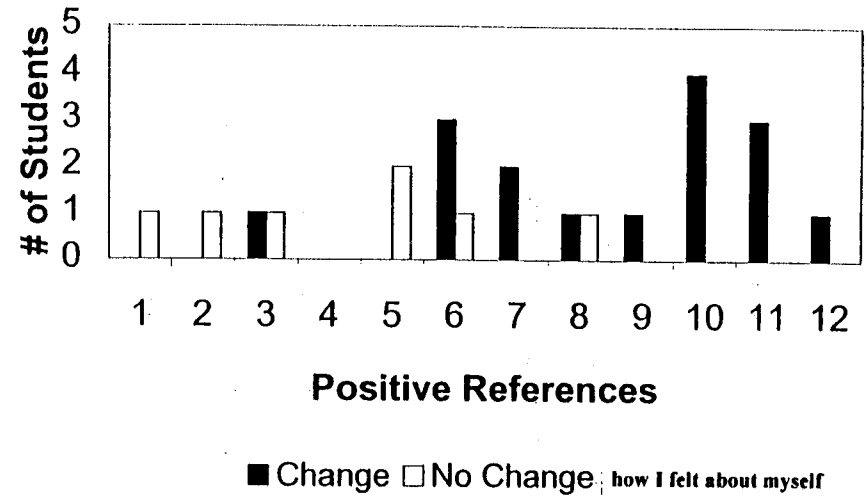


Figure 4.10

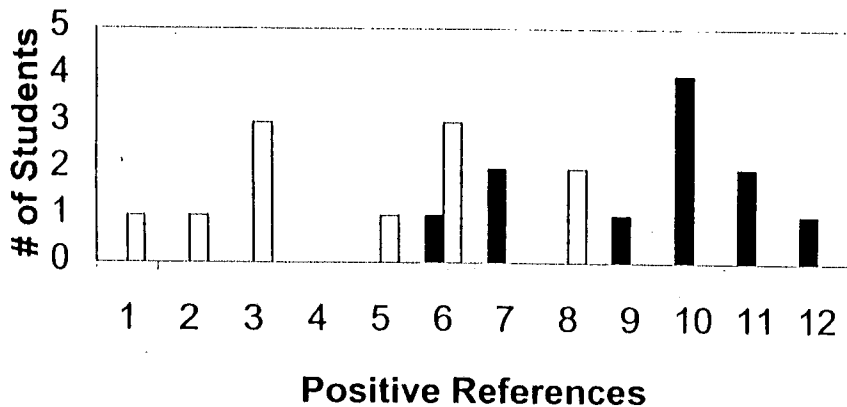
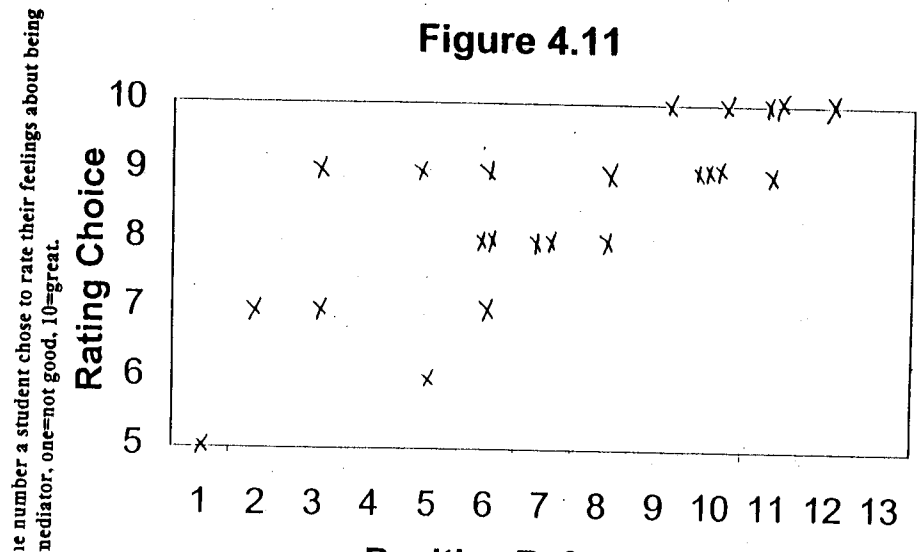


Figure 4.11



The reaction and praise by adults to students involved in peer mediation may also contribute to feelings of positive self-esteem. Students mentioned in different occasions throughout the interview that they felt their teachers or parents trusted them more or gave them more responsibility. Students also mentioned that their parents liked them being involved in a program like mediation which promotes peace and involves helping other individuals. As adults see a student being responsible in one activity they expect more from that student in other activities which reinforces the empowering message that the adult feels the student is worthy and capable, two important aspects of self-esteem. Thus the concept of self-esteem in this data is strongly linked to the student's perception of how the adults and role models in their lives value the student's participation in peer mediation.

Relationships

Exactly half of the students indicated that peer mediation had changed their relationship with their parents, in some way, these students indicated that their parents felt proud of them or they now solved problems differently with their parents, the other half reported no change in their relationship with their parents. These results seem to indicate that in only some cases students transfer their mediation skills to use in the home with their parents. Several factors could contribute to why some students use these skills at home and why others do not. One factor is the relationship that already exists with their parents, some students may already use mediation type skills when in conflict with their parents, others may be encouraged by their parents to use and discuss their skills at home

and still other peer mediators may not be encourage to use their skills with their parents. Changing how the family deals with conflict is a difficult matter and possibly not a welcomed change in some families.

A very important fact that may impact how these students use mediation with their parents is that it is called *peer* mediation at school and students are allowed to mediate peers but not as often with adults and in fact it has been the researcher's experience that many adults when asked will choose not to mediate because of power issues and the relinquishing of the adult authoritarian role. Therefore students may not feel comfortable or even able to mediate with their parents or any other adult. Cultural and familial boundaries may also inhibit students from using mediation with adults. Traditionally adults have more power and have made the discipline decisions for students and it may feel threatening to adults and students to use mediation because the boundaries of the roles everyone plays may blur a little. Another reason why some students say they do not use mediation with their parents is that as beginning mediators they are taught to always go through all the steps of mediation and as they acquire more skills and experience mediators begin to discover their own style and ability when solving problems and may vary the steps slightly and go more in depth with questions with disputants. Some students therefore may have began to use some mediation skills such as listening, asking questions, and stating how you feel with the parents more than before but not consider it using mediation skills because they are not going through all of the mediation steps they go through when doing a formal mediation. Also a student's style and the family's style of communication at home may impact if a mediator uses mediation skills at

home, for example open and closed family systems would impact the use of mediation as well as cultural factors especially around issues of respect for adults.

Slightly over half (13/23) of the students approximately also stated that their relationships with their siblings were impacted by their involvement in peer mediation. These students stated that they did more talking and problem solving including compromising and looking at the problem from the other person's point of view, then they did before. The ages of the siblings may impact how much the mediator uses these skills with their siblings, for example some mentioned that their siblings were not yet in school and too little to understand mediation ideas, while other siblings were much older and often had more power and authority than the mediator making them unequal peers. Peer mediation is also a mutual process and if some siblings are not willing to try to talk things out it will not work thus discourage the mediator from using the process at home with their siblings.

Many students, 17 out of 25 responses, said that peer mediation had impacted their friendships in some way and of those students who indicated that peer mediation did not impact their friendships they said they did not argue with their friends and therefore felt peer mediation made no difference in their relationships, still others indicated they did not use it in their friendships. Those who did feel it had made a difference stated that they solved problems differently and got along better with their friends now. Several students stated that they became closer to their friends who were also in mediation or made new ones with others in mediation. Still other students felt that because they had learned to

control their temper or solve their own problems they were able to get along with their friends more easily.

Fun

The theme of fun was mentioned several times in the interviews as part of the reason students joined or enjoyed peer mediation. In many cases fun was secondary to the desire to help others but yet it was still an important part of peer mediation. The fun aspects of peer mediation could possibly affect many different aspect of peer mediation and impact the student's desire to continue participating in peer mediation. It may be the fun which creates the atmosphere for the students to learn and practice mediation steps repetitively with out becoming bored thus becoming competent mediators. Fun also contributes to the peer relationships that mediators indicated that they improved or built since becoming a peer mediator by creating a good environment for the mediators to get to know each other and develop new friendships. Therefore their experience of having fun in mediation impacts their relationships, skills, and ultimately their self-concept of themselves as mediators.

Leadership Skills

Leadership was defined for the purposes of this study as someone who was a role model, takes charge, or guides people. It was very interesting how students perceived the word leader in the interviews and some students seemed to feel it was a negative label. Unfortunately, the researcher did not define a leader unless the student needed a prompt in the interview, so in some cases students said they were not a leader because they did not feel better than others or didn't feel they stood out among the peer mediators. Other students said they felt they were leaders and had always been a leader or were leaders with the younger children, while a few students felt they were role models and leaders with their friends and peers and that mediation was the reason they were now role models which could be another source contributing to the self-esteem of these students. Not all students felt that peer mediation made them leaders they felt more like they were just doing something they wanted to do-help people and help the school, making it seem as peer mediation was more of a personal way to fulfill a desire to do more than they had been doing for others and their school and themselves than as a way to become a leader.

School Perception

The purpose of mediation is to reduce violence and promote peaceful problem solving amongst students in school and some students really focused on this mezzo level

of change and indicated that they wanted to help their school become a better, safer place by reducing the violence. Other students seemed to focus more on the micro level, or the individual level of change, by focusing on what they would get out of peer mediation and what each individual student they helped would get out of it the focus being on the disputant themselves and not how it impacted the school. This could be due to how much time is spent teaching students how to work with disputants and because peer mediation is very personal and different for each student who goes through a mediation. The differences in personal attitudes of the mediators towards school again depended on several things including, but not limited to, how they already felt about school, how invested they were in the mediation program, their experience as a mediator, and the school community's attitude towards mediation. When asked if their view of school had changed since their involvement in peer mediation 11 out of 23 students indicated a change in their attitudes while 11 others stated there had not been any change in their attitudes and one person skipped the question. Due to the even split of answers to this question no definite conclusion can be reached although it does appear that in some cases being a peer mediator impacted the way students viewed their school. Students indicated that they felt more involved, felt they were role models and had to act accordingly, found themselves paying more attention to the things going on in their school and enjoyed school more. All of these things may be due to an increased sense of belonging for some students, increased responsibilities, feelings of empowerment and their recognition of their ability to make a difference in their school. Students who were more highly invested in the peer mediation program and also spoke more positively about themselves were also the

students who felt that their perception of school had changed. Those students who indicated that they didn't feel their perception of school had changed were also less likely to want to continue to be peer mediators, rated their experience as peer mediators lower, and spoke fewer positive comments about themselves and their experience as peer mediators.

Limitations of this Study

This research study used a qualitative exploratory design to explore and capture student mediators perceptions of the mediation program's impacts on themselves. This type of study design was very critical in capturing the student's in-depth perspectives about mediation and to promote an understanding about how mediation personally benefited student mediators. In fact students said several things that may have been missed if they were only answering closed questions or circling pre-determined answers on a survey, however this study design also has some drawbacks. One drawback is that the exploratory nature of this study gave the researcher themes to explore about mediation's impacts on student mediators but also makes it hard to determine definite conclusions. Exploratory studies give insight into research that may be done in the future that would be able to provide definite concrete examples. In the literature available about peer mediation research, one criticism of research has been that it is not tangible enough giving answers and drawing conclusions from random sources. Although this study is hard to generalize due to sample selection, and some would say sample size, it does provide concrete

examples of the perceptions of student mediators themselves on the personal impacts of peer mediation, something that is missing in the available research. It must also be considered that although the sample size may not be large in quantitative study standards, this is a qualitative study and the very nature of indepth research adds to the generalizability of a study. This is a point of much debate among qualitative and quantitative researchers.

Subject selection is another concern for this study. Students were selected by the school social worker and facilitator of the peer mediation programs by determining if they fit a criteria of: between the ages of 10-13, in mediation for at least six months and still involved in the program. They were selected as normative case examples, or subjects who were examples of the average peer mediator. This was done in hopes of providing data that was typical of peer mediators in the Elk River district in grades five and six and the fact that the subjects were not all from the same school helps the data to be more accurate of peer mediators in the district and not just one school. However due to the fact that this is not a random sample the researcher needs to allow for selection bias by the school social workers participating in this study.

Other limits to this study include a social desirability bias and a historical bias. The social desirability bias means that the subjects may have been giving the researcher the answers they felt she wanted to hear and answers that were socially appropriate to the situation. The other possible bias is one of time passage, since students were asked to reflect on their peer mediation experience and feelings about changes in themselves during

the course of time as a mediator which for some students had been almost two years, the changes in these students may have been caused by other factors.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This research study has many implications for social workers who work with children and also for school change. In many schools it is the social workers who introduce the concept of peer mediation to the administration, staff, parents and students. It often is the domain of social workers to start a program, facilitate the program, find funding, encourage staff and students to utilize the program, and train students. The peer mediators in this study in most cases indicated that they indeed perceived mediation as making a personal difference in their lives, self-esteem or relationships. Peer mediation gives students a chance to help others as well as develop important conflict resolution skills both which impact their view of themselves and their role in society.

* Many of the peer mediation programs including those in these three schools in the study involve teaching mediation skills to only a small portion of students. However many more students could get a positive self-esteem experience if they too could be taught the skills of peer mediation and conflict resolution. By teaching the whole school ways to resolve conflicts more students could feel empowered. Social workers can work towards the goal of involving whole schools in the mediation process.

* Another implication from this study is that students are looking for ways to help other people and this is an important part of their development of their identity and as

societal members. The majority of students in this study chose helping others as their favorite part of mediation even over fun, missing class or having parties. Social workers need to look into all options that might provide healthy experiences and opportunities for students to help others.

* Being chosen to belong to a group also plays a part in mediation and why students felt good about being involved. Social workers can again look at ways in mediation or in other activities for opportunities for students to belong and be viewed as valuable group members and can encourage others working with children to do the same thing.

* The research from this study indicated that only some students used peer mediation skills with their parents. There are several factors why this may be but it also illustrates the need for there to be a link between school and parents. Social workers are often helpful in establishing a connection between parents and school and in the case of peer mediation could be instrumental in involving the families of peer mediators in the mediation program. Social workers could start ideas such as asking parents to practice skills with students at home, having families come to school one evening to learn about mediation, or possibly having parents volunteer to help with some of the training of peer mediators. Social workers can also advocate for mediation to be used by adults when conflicts arise between families and the school.

* Another implication for social workers is the need for a macro focus view of conflict. Schools are teaching students to resolve conflicts peacefully but in many cases these students may be living in violent neighborhoods or areas of tension and gang activity

referred to by the media as war zones. Social workers need to encourage students, administrators and communities to be aware and active in advocating for peace in their neighborhoods by participating or starting community programs that do not allow violence.

* Practice evaluation is very important for social workers to continue to do and advocate for more. This study discussed in the literature review the need for more evaluation and the benefits it could bring. Often it is easy to forget or avoid evaluating a program but social workers must continually evaluate services to ensure that their clients needs are being met in the best way possible.

* Lastly social workers can approach schools and other funding entities with new angles for funding by focusing on the knowledge that peer mediation not only teaches students to solve conflicts peacefully therefore encouraging less violence in schools but it also is a way to promote lifelong conflict resolution skills students can use in and outside of the school environment, boost self-esteem, improve relationships, give children a chance to belong and a chance to help others, and possibly change lives.

Future Studies

This researcher would recommend future studies involving the impact of peer mediation on students. These studies would benefit from gathering information from students, teachers, and parents and gathering information before peer mediation training begins and after students have been involved in a program for one school year. Since this

study seems to indicate students feel their self-esteem has benefited from peer mediation and speak positively about their experience and themselves, this researcher feels quantitative evaluations of self-esteem or self-concept of peer mediators before and after involvement in a peer mediation program or between mediators and a control group would be a very interesting addition to the current literature.

Summary

Peer mediation in this study was a positive experience for most subjects and did impact many students' self-esteem, problem solving and relationships with siblings and peers. The impact of peer mediation involvement on relationships with parents, leadership abilities and perception of their school were much harder to determine in this study and were influenced by many different factors such as the current parental relationship, style of communication in the home, personal views of what a leader was, and each mediators individual school experience. This study gives concrete examples and starting points for future studies including gathering information from parents and teachers, pre-test and post-test design to measure self-esteem, and studies with control groups. Implications for social workers include promoting all school mediation training, finding opportunities for students to help others, providing opportunities for students to belong, and new angles for funding.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory study was completed in order to investigate the impact of student mediators' participation in a peer mediation program on the students especially in the areas of self-esteem, relationships, leadership, and school perception. This qualitative research study was carried out in three elementary schools in the Elk River school district that had peer mediation programs. It consisted of 23 subjects who all fit the criteria of: being between the ages of 10-13, having been trained in peer mediation, and having been involved in a program for at least six months. The subjects, a maximum of ten from each school, were selected by the school social workers who facilitated the peer mediation programs through a process of typical case sampling. Each subject was interviewed by the researcher in a semi-structured interview that was audio-taped, transcribed, and then analyzed through the process of content analysis.

The information from this study indicates that many of the students felt they had changed in positive ways and felt their self-esteem had also changed. Students stated that since their involvement in peer mediation they felt better about themselves, felt more responsible and were proud of themselves. Many students felt that due to their knowledge in problem solving their relationships with siblings and peers had been impacted since they became involved in peer mediation as they now handled their conflicts better.

Relationships with their parents changed for about half of the mediators and several students said that their parents were proud of them or liked them being involved in peer mediation. Of those students who said their relationships did not change with their parents, many indicated they had positive conflict solving skills with their parents already

or said they did not have conflict with their parents. Another factor that may impact how much of their peer mediation skills students use with their parents is that students are trained to mediate other students and the power issues change when they use mediation skills with adults.

Subjects did not overwhelmingly view themselves as leaders although some stated that they knew they were now role models just as many students said that leadership depended on the situation and indicated that peer mediation was not about leadership but about helping others. A concrete conclusion cannot be reached to answer the question of how peer mediation involvement impacts school perception since equal numbers of students indicated that they felt their perception had changed in some positive ways since becoming a peer mediator and students who felt their involvement in peer mediation had not changed their view of school at all.

This research clearly shows the desire of these subjects to help others and feel they are contributing positively to their environment as they go through the stage of forming their identity, which occurs in upper elementary school and junior high, according to Erickson's psychosocial theory. During the formation of their identity individuals form their ideas about who they are and what they can contribute to society. The students involved in peer mediation are already learning not only how others benefit, but also how they benefit from helping people and will no doubt continue to look for more activities that will give them other opportunities to help people in many different ways.

The peer mediators are also learning ways of resolving conflicts and working cooperatively together towards a common goal and this will benefit these students in their academic careers as they continue to grow and be exposed in the schools to cooperative learning experiences. Their experience as mediators and knowledge of conflict resolution and problem solving skills will also benefit these students in their adult lives as they encounter conflicts they need to resolve either in their personal lives or in their careers. The impact of the peer mediators goes beyond their direct contact with other students when doing mediations and it also extends, as several mediators pointed out, to the other students, especially the younger students, who are watching how peer mediators solve their conflicts and are looking up to them as role models, and as social learning theory tells us students learn what they see, so the mediators are setting visible and important examples for these students to follow.

The information from this study is not without its' limits, particularly sample size, but it does provide concrete examples of the impact of peer mediation on the lives of students in three different elementary schools in the Elk River school district. These examples and the resulting information indicates that the students in this study felt peer mediation had impacted their feelings about themselves, their relationships and their conflict resolution skills and adds to the current literature giving future researchers another documented point of reference as they look into the impacts of peer mediation on students.

This study also has some implications for social workers which include: encouraging schools to train the whole school in peer mediation and conflict resolution so

every student has access to more problem solving skills and opportunities of empowerment which can contribute to their self-esteem and identity formation; finding ways for students to have helping opportunities where they can learn and benefit from helping other people which again contributes to their identity and self-esteem; promoting activities which contribute to empowerment and a sense of belonging; building the link between schools and parents, including peacemaking in a macro focus, the importance of practice evaluations, and new information and new angles for social workers to use to gain funding for peer mediation programs.

This study answers the research question, how does being involved in a peer mediation program impact student mediators, and also uncovered a new angle of peer mediation that the researcher did not fully anticipate. Peer mediation is not popular because it is fun, students miss class or because they gain a power by becoming leaders and role models, it is popular because it gives students the tools and opportunity to help others and because it empowers students to be responsible for their actions and conveys confidence by adults that students are capable of performing mediations and solving conflicts. It was not expected that the actual helping of others was the main driving force behind why students continue in mediation. Students feel capable, good and proud of themselves by being involved in these mediation programs and this is what truly makes these students the peacemakers of our world.

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Appendix

Appendix A
Key Concepts

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

In order to have a common understanding of key concepts and terms found in the literature for the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined nominally and operationally as used in this research.

Conflict- Any verbal, physical, or emotional disagreement between two or more individuals of any age, where two forces are opposite in direction (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

(Operational) The self- reporting of any disagreement between individuals.

Conflict Resolution -A method that can be used at the micro, mezzo or macro levels by individuals, groups and organizations that enables them to interact in positive ways in order to resolve their differences peacefully.

(Operational) The use of positive methods to resolve conflicts as self-reported by individuals.

Student - A child age 18 or younger in any public educational setting.

(Operational) A student currently enrolled in a public educational setting as evident by the inclusion of their name on a class list.

Peer Mediation- A structured process in which individuals are trained in conflict resolution and then are able to use their resolution skills to resolve conflicts for themselves and others.

(Operational) The recognition by staff and students in a school of a program in which students help others solve problems peacefully, as measured by self-report.

Peer Mediator-A student who has attended a school training and learned to help others solve their conflicts and who is involved in a peer mediation program.

(Operational) A student whose name is listed as one who has completed training in conflict resolution and now has the skills to help their peers with their conflicts.

Mediation Skills- The steps of mediation and other skills taught during training. These include listening, asking questions, restating, clarifying, and problem solving.

(Operational) The ability of a student to recite and demonstrate the steps used in the mediation process as reported by the student.

Self-Esteem- Judgments, including thoughts and feelings, by an individual about the extent to which the self is good, capable, significant, and praiseworthy (Berg, L., 1991).

(Operational) The number of times in the interview in which the student speaks positively about himself or herself.

Leadership Skills- The ability to have positive or negative effects on others by serving as a model by which others base their actions.

(Operational) The degree to which students self-report their influence on their peers.

Relationship- A connection, either through blood, experience or choice, with another person.

(Operational) The self-reporting of individuals with whom the subject feels connected with.

School Climate- The atmosphere of a school setting and the student's and staff's perceptions regarding how comfortable, safe and welcoming the school is.

(Operational) The self-reporting by students to the degree they perceive their school as a comfortable and safe place.

Appendix B

Consent Form and Study Letter

The Impact of Peer Mediation on Student Mediators Consent Form

You are invited to be in a research study of the impacts of peer mediation on students. You were selected as a possible participant because you have been involved in a peer mediation program at your school. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to the study.

This study is being conducted by me, Lisa Laehn, as part of my master's thesis in social work at Augsburg College.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to gather more information about how students feel being involved in a peer mediation program has affected them especially in the areas of leadership skills, self esteem, relationships, and view of their school.

Procedure:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following thing. You would need to attend a half hour interview with me one time during the school day. You will be notified of the time, day and location of your interview by your peer mediation facilitator once you have signed and returned this form. I will do my best to work with your facilitator to select times that will disrupt your school day as little as possible. A copy of the questions that I will ask has been included for you to look over. At any time before or during the interview you may withdraw from the study. You may also choose to skip any question during the interview that you do not feel comfortable answering. All answers that you give will be confidential. Your name will not be used in the written paper reporting the results of the study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Since the questions will ask you how you feel about certain things and ask you to reflect on how being in mediation has impacted you, the questions may bring forth some feelings or concerns that you need to talk about to someone. The name of the school social worker is _____ her phone number is _____. You will also have the opportunity to talk about the interview in your mediation group if you choose.

Direct benefits to participation are a summary of the results of the study upon completion. Indirect benefits include your contribution to the knowledge of peer mediation. Your information may help your school to improve on their mediation program.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher will have access to the records.

Tape recordings will be made of your interview. The researcher and an individual hired to transcribe the tapes into written form are the only individuals who will have access to these tapes. These tapes and all raw data will be destroyed within one year of the interview.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with your school, the school district, or Augsburg College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Lisa Laehn. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at:

Lisa Laehn
Handke Elementary
1170 Main Street
Elk River, MN 55330
Phone: 241-3400 ext. 5546

My thesis advisor, Rosemary Link can also help answer questions. She can be contacted at:

Augsburg College
Department of Social Work
2211 Riverside Ave.
Mpls, Mn 55454
Phone: 330-1147

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked any questions I have had and have received answers. I consent to participate/allow my child to participate in the study and to be audio taped.

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____

Please return this consent form in the enclosed envelope. Thank you.

Dear Peer Mediators and Parents,

My name is Lisa Laehn. I am a school social worker at Zimmerman and Handke Elementary schools. I am currently attending graduate school at Augsburg College in Minneapolis. As part of my graduation requirements I am conducting a study on peer mediation. I am going to be talking to peer mediators in our school district about their experience as a peer mediator. I am hoping to gather information to share with the schools that will strengthen our peer mediation programs. This is where I need your help. I am looking for peer mediators who would be willing to talk with me in a half-hour interview about mediation. The questions I will ask are attached to this letter.

Parents- Please read the following information with your child for more information about the study. If you have questions please contact me and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have. If you have no further questions and your child would like to be a part of this study please sign the consent form and have your child return it to their peer mediation facilitator. Thanks for your help.

Students- If you are interested in telling me about your experiences in mediation I would like to talk with you. Please have a parent sign the permission slip and return it to Mrs. Miller, your peer mediation facilitator. When I get this permission form back she will let you know when I will come talk to you. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Lisa Laehn

Appendix C

Interview Schedule

Yes- How has mediation affected your leadership abilities?

11. Do you think that you feel differently about school now that you are involved in peer mediation? Can you explain how you feel different?

Prompt: Are you happier, more sad, aware of what is happening in school?

Prompt: Do you feel the same as you did before you were a mediator?

12. Would you like to be a peer mediator again next year? Please explain your answer.

Prompt: If you can be a peer mediator next year will you choose to be one?

13. What would you tell another student about peer mediation?

14. Pick a number, from a scale of 1-10, 1 =not good and 10=great, to describe how you feel about being a peer mediator. Explain your answer.

15. Pick a number, from a scale of 1-10, 1 =not good and 10=great, to describe how you feel about yourself as a peer mediator, by this I mean your mediation skills. Explain your answer.

16. Would you recommend peer mediation to your friends? Why or Why not?

17. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about peer mediation?

