TEACHING ADOLESCENTS CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS
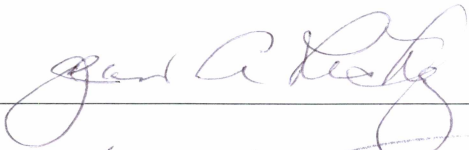
OR

DEVELOPING A WORKSHOP TO TEACH

ADOLESCENTS CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

By

Debra M. DeLong

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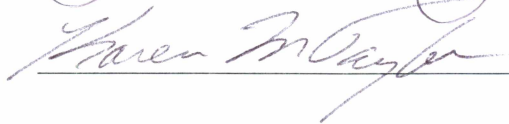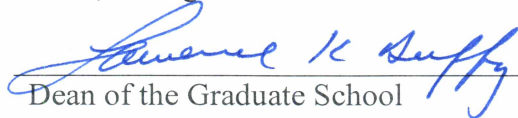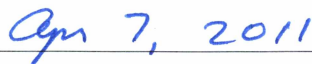
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Date   Apr 7, 2011

TEACHING ADOLESCENTS CONFLICT MANAGEMENT SKILLS

A

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty

of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Fairbanks, Alaska

May 2011

Abstract

In response to a parents request a workshop to teach a conflict management workshop to high school students was created. A pre-post test design to assess the effectiveness of the workshop was used, with the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument as the measurement. Responses were available for 76 students who were evenly divided between females and males. Overall preferences for using conflict styles did not show a statistically significant change; however, preferences for individual styles did change, with competition showing a statistically significant difference.

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Acknowledgments

So many people helped me along my journey towards completing this project. I would like to thank first my parents for your support, monetary and otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to continue without knowing you had my back. My children, Christian and Jessica, for their belief in me. Jessica, thanks for proof reading, your encouragement and faith in me and telling me "You can do it, Mom!" Uncle Chris for the long conversations and reality checks-what did they do before the telephone? To everyone in meetings, thank you for allowing me to call all hours of the day and night in panic about finishing.

I would also like to thank Mrs. Glenda Anderson for her willingness to let me use her class time for my project and to the FNSBSD for permission to conduct the workshop.

Thank you to my committee, Dr. Jean Richey, and Dr. Karen Taylor for their willingness to step in and encouragement. I did it Jean!

Lastly, but not least, I would like to thank Dr. Robert Arundale for his unfailing patience, kindness, and perseverance in this project. It has been a long haul through a lot of personal and physical pain but he has persevered and wouldn't give up on me, at times volunteering his time and expertise but always giving his self. I truly couldn't have done it without him. Thank you, Bob!

Chapter 1

Review of Related Literature

1.1 Statement of the Problem and Goals of the Research

I hear and I forget

I see and I remember

I do and I understand

Confucius

Conflict is inevitable in most relationships at some time or another, "an inescapable part of our daily lives" (Weeks, 1992). Managing conflict through effective communication is an essential skill in building and maintaining satisfying relationships. How we manage that conflict throughout our lives powerfully affects our relationships, business success, and quality of life. Learning how to manage conflict effectively is an important skill, yet most people have little knowledge of effective conflict management techniques.

Adolescence is ideally a time during which children are learning the skills needed to take their place in the adult world. However, today's adolescents face numerous interpersonal problems on a day to day basis as a result of family and relationship conflicts, together with academic and social pressures. Such problems have been found to contribute to an increased risk of a variety of emotional-social-cognitive difficulties in adolescence. These include academic failure, social misbehavior, interpersonal

problems, and depression (Frydenberg et al., 2004). Learning about conflict management is the first step to develop the behaviors needed to effectively deal with conflict. Formal training in conflict management would help them develop behaviors needed to deal more effectively with the conflicts that arise in their families and relationships, and that precipitate these difficulties.

I became interested in conflict management while addressing the needs of a parent who had contacted the Communication Department to ask about interpersonal communication training for her teen. This parent was in search of a program similar to professional development seminars she had attended. She was frustrated that the programs offered by her child's school and local social services only targeted "at risk" teens. I also had two teens and shared this mother's observation that interpersonal communication classes for adolescents would be of benefit. This gap in services created an opportunity to provide interpersonal communication training to adolescents, so I began a process of determining the best way to fill this gap.

I first interviewed the parent who had contacted the Department to discuss what type of training she envisioned for her teen. She voiced concerns about interpersonal communication and anger management, stating that both seemed to be significant issues in her daughter's life. I also discussed this issue with school counselors who stated unequivocally that they believed all adolescents had issues concerning effective communication and would benefit from all aspects of interpersonal communication training. Although adults had expressed an interest, it was imperative that there be adolescents willing to participate. As a concerned parent I asked the daughter to recruit

several of her friends and classmates to join a focus group aimed at the adolescents'
needs with regard to training in interpersonal communication. As a parent I knew that
teens would be more likely to participate if they were encouraged by someone their own
age.

In preparation for the focus group I formulated open ended questions regarding
interpersonal issues concerned with conflict in their daily lives. The focus group I
facilitated involved eight adolescents, and lasted two and a half hours. I recorded the
discussion, listened to the recording multiple times, and identified three themes. 1)
authority figures, especially school authorities, characterized by confrontational attitudes
owing to feelings of powerlessness; 2) conflict with family, especially parents,
characterized by withdrawal owing to reluctance to break family ties; and 3) conflict with
those of other cultures, especially peers from urban backgrounds who had recently moved
to Alaska. As a result of this focus group I was able to determine that a skills workshop
was needed to expose the students to the concept of conflict management; other
workshops could be added later to address other interpersonal communication issues in
further detail. I contacted my daughter's high school health teacher about presenting a
conflict management workshop to my daughter's class. She enthusiastically endorsed the
idea with the caveat that no student would be left out. Having identified a clear need to
help adolescents communicate more effectively and to manage their conflicts in a more
productive way, I began my thesis project to develop a conflict communication workshop
within a high school health class and to assess its effectiveness in changing a student's

understanding of conflict management. The primary goal of the workshop was to help students learn how to manage conflict in a healthy, safe, and productive way.

1.2 Conflict Defined

Most people view conflict as a communication problem to be avoided or eliminated because it creates difficulties in interpersonal or international relationships. Conflict cannot be eliminated because it is an inevitable part of human communication; however, because it often creates serious problems it needs to be managed effectively (Stewart, Zediker, & Witteborn, 2005). People's views of conflict are formed in their cultural environment. For most Westerners, who place high emphasis on individual rights and values, conflict is viewed as an opportunity; a useful process that can result in renewal and strengthening of relationships (Canary, Cupach, & Messman, 1995). On the other hand, cultures that place emphasis on group relationships tend to view conflict as a destructive force and view open disagreement as inappropriate.

Conflict is not inherently bad, although most people view it negatively (Stewart et al., 2005). Everyday language often uses strongly negative metaphors to describe conflict metaphors that can stifle the creativity needed to address conflict productively (Wilmot & Hocker, 1998). Part of the problem is that when people think about conflict they only think about part of it, usually the intense feelings before and during the conflict. However, conflict can produce positive outcomes, such as reducing "group think" (Janis, 1972), moving situations out of a rut, and helping to promote confidence in the

relationship (Stewart et al., 2005). Conflict can be helpful when it provides a way for feelings to be made known and expressed in an environment where they can be acknowledged. This act of sharing and expressing feelings can promote genuine interpersonal contact. From a Western perspective, conflict can be seen as a positive force and as personally empowering.

Many researchers have attempted to define what is meant by "conflict." A definition by Coser (1967) referenced the Cold War conflict between the United States and the former USSR, in which conflict was viewed either as a win-win or as an oppositional situation. He states that conflict is "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the rivals" (p. 8). Deutsch (1973) maintains "conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur . . . an action which prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures, or in some way makes it less likely or less effective" (p.156). That definition was expanded by Mack and Snyder (1973) to state that at least two parties must be present, along with "position scarcity" or "resource scarcity," in addition to behaviors that "destroy, injure, thwart, or otherwise control another party or parties . . . in which the parties can gain (relatively) only at each other's expense" (p. 36). Each of these earlier social science definitions helps distinguish conflict from simple strain, disagreement, or controversy (Simons, 1972; Schmidt & Kochan, 1972).

Contemporary definitions of conflict focus on the interdependence of the parties rather than on their opposition. Donohue and Kolt (1992) define conflict as "a situation in which the interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying

their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing in these goals" (p. 3). Jordan (1990) writes that "conflict arises when a difference between two (or more) people necessitates change in at least one person in order for their engagement to continue and develop. "The differences cannot coexist without some adjustment" (p. 4). Wilmot and Hocker (1998) define conflict as "an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals" (p. 34). As Putnam (2006) makes evident in her overview of definitions used in research in conflict communication, Wilmot and Hocker's 1998 definition includes all of the elements or factors found in contemporary definitions of conflict. Given that this definition has also been widely used in discussions of interpersonal communication (e.g. Stewart et al., 2005) it was employed in this research. Each of the key components of Wilmot and Hocker's definition needs to be examined more closely.

1.2.1 Expressed Struggle. Interpersonal conflict involves a communicative exchange between individuals and/or groups. Conflict becomes concrete in a communication exchange, either verbal or nonverbal, between interdependent parties. Intrapersonal conflict or internal strain creates a state of ambivalence and conflicting internal dialogue; there can be a lack of resolution in one's thinking and feeling which can continue for extended periods of time. Yet, if the internal struggle remains internal and is never expressed to another party, it is not defined as conflict. Communication is intrinsic to all interpersonal conflict. However, although all conflict involves

communication, not all conflict is rooted in poor communication (Stewart et al., 2005). Some conflicts cannot be resolved, but they can be managed interpersonally.

1.2.2 Interdependence. Parties struggle and interfere with each other because they are interdependent. Braiker and Kelly (1979) state that "a person who is not dependent upon another - that is, who has no special interest in what the other does - has no conflict with that other person" (p. 137). Each person's choices affect the other because conflict is a mutual activity; all conflict includes some collaboration (Stewart et al.; 2005). As Lerner (1985) states in *Dance of Anger* each party must participate in the dance in order for conflict to exist.

1.2.3 Perceived Incompatible Goals. Opposing goals are a fact of life. Many times people are convinced that they have opposing goals and cannot agree on anything to pursue their goals together. The perception that there "isn't enough to go around" may be because both parties want the same thing or alternatively, their goals may be different and the struggle may be over an incompatible choice. People may find that they can have conflicting positions but compatible interests (Fisher & Ury, 1981). Thus, their immediate goals or positions put them in conflict, but by focusing on broader interests they may be able to find room for agreement.

1.2.4 Perceived Scarce Resources. A resource is any physical, economic, or social consequence that people perceive positively (Wilmot & Hocker, 1998). Both resources and their scarcity may be objectively real or be perceived as real. Regardless of the particular issues involved, people in conflict usually perceive that they have too little of the resource while the other party has too much.

1.2.5 Interference. If the presence of another person interferes with a desired action, then conflict intensifies. In conflict, people often assume that others are willfully interfering with or blocking their needs (Peterson, 1983) and the person doing the blocking is perceived as the problem.

1.3 Styles for Managing Conflict

As Wilmot and Hocker (1998) note, most people do not plan their approach to conflict situations, instead their conflict styles are "patterned responses or clusters of behavior that people use in conflict." Conflict styles have been examined extensively in interpersonal conflict management research and various classifications have been developed that range from definitions using two styles (Deutsch, 1949; Tjosvold, 1990) to definitions encompassing five styles. Yelsma and Brown (1985) identified individual assertiveness and cooperativeness as basic styles that influence conflict management. Follett (1924) suggested domination, compromise, and integration as primary ways to deal with conflict. Daves and Holland (1989) revised Follett's conflict styles to include confrontation, collaboration and integrative problem solving while Blake and Mouton (1964) added two additional strategies: avoidance and smoothing.

Blake and Mouton (1978) recommended collaborative behavior as the best way to manage and resolve conflict, on the basis that direct contact brings understanding and cooperation, while potentially reducing antagonism, injustice, alienation and conformity. Fisher and Ury (1981) later asserted that competitive styles are less effective in conflict resolution than collaborative styles. Pruitt (1983) posited that a high level of concern for

self and others is what brings about conflict resolution. Thomas (1976) refined Blake and Mouton's (1964) theory to consider intentions, and classified conflict management styles into five types: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating, with the two underlying dimensions of cooperativeness and assertiveness.

The five styles of conflict management identified by Thomas and Kilmann (1974) are the most widely cited and most widely employed in training (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998) and hence are employed in this research. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument is designed to assess an individual's behaviour in conflict situations, which they define as situations in which the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible. In these situations, Thomas and Kilmann (1974) define the five styles by graphically locating them according to two dimensions: 1) assertiveness or concern for self and 2) cooperativeness or concern for other, as in Figure 1.
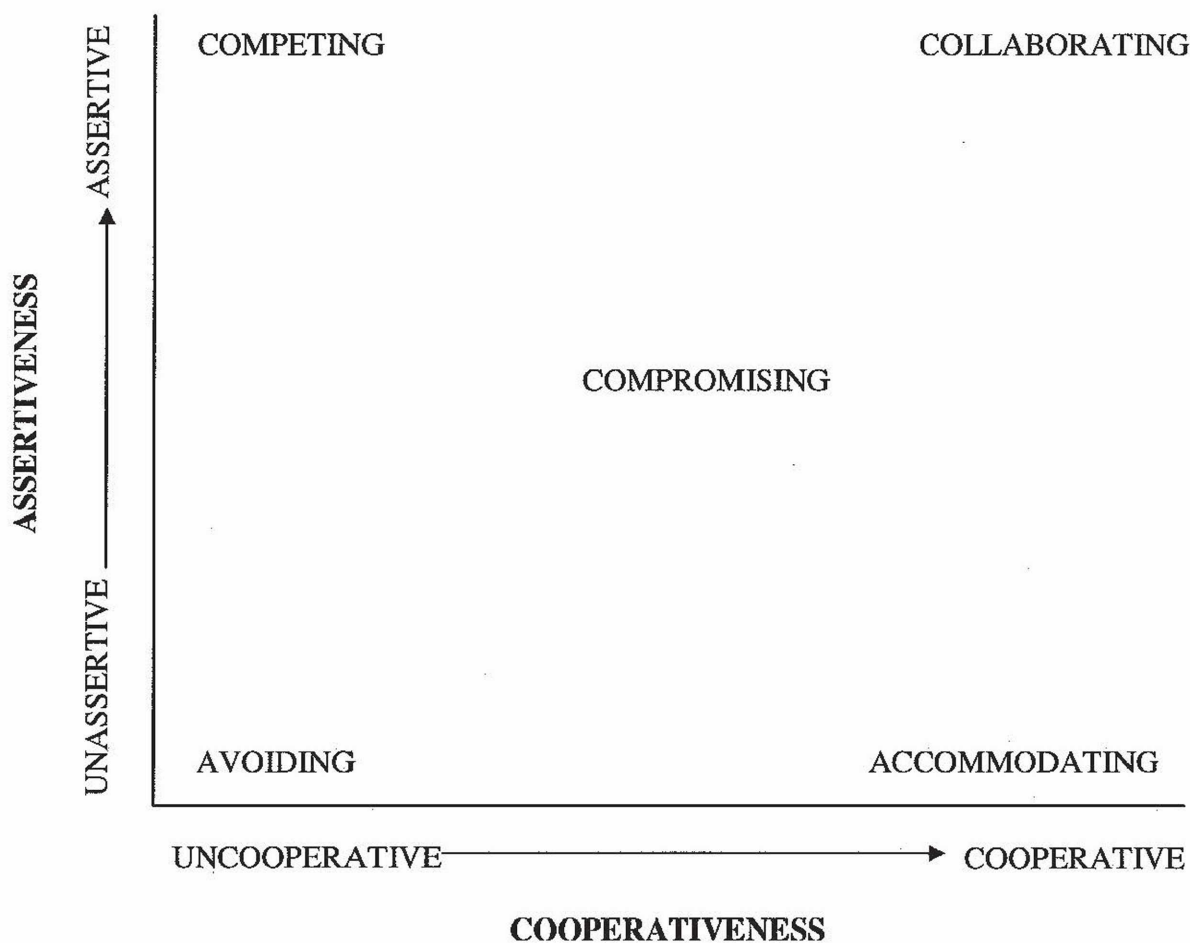
Figure 1. The Five Conflict Handling Modes

Approaching conflict with avoidance represents low concern for oneself and low concern for the other. Accommodation, by contrast, represents low concern for oneself, but high concern for the other (one gives the other what they want). The opposite of accommodation is competition; one is concerned for oneself, but has no concern for the other. Collaborating is the opposite of avoiding, with high concern for self and others. Compromise is exactly in the middle of the graph, with equal concern for self and others.

The five management styles also form the basis for the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, which was the instrument employed in this research to assess students' preferred conflict styles. Each of the five styles needs to be considered briefly.

1.3.1 Competition. A competitive or "power over" style is characterized by aggressive and uncooperative behavior in which the individual pursues personal concerns at the other person's expense. This is a power oriented mode, in which one uses whatever power seems available to win one's own position – for rank, economic sanctions, even one's ability to argue. Competing might mean "standing up for your rights," defending a position which you believe is correct, or simply trying to win (Thomas, 1976). It is a useful style if the external goal is more important than the relationship with the other person, such as in a short term, non-repeating relationship or when quick, decisive action is vital, such as emergencies. Competitive tactics such as name calling, fault finding, or acting in forceful and controlling ways may seem synonymous with conflict. Confrontational remarks are at the heart of "I win-you lose" perspectives. At their core, all competitive tactics involve wanting the other party to change (Wilmot & Hocker, 1998).

1.3.2 Accommodation. Accommodating, the opposite of competing, is an unassertive and cooperative style. When accommodating, an individual neglects personal concerns in order to satisfy the concerns of others. This style includes an element of self-sacrifice and might include selfless generosity or yielding to another's point of view (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). In many Western cultures, women are socialized in both avoidance and accommodation to preserve harmony and avoid disruption (Stewart et al.,

2005). Accommodation is useful in allowing the other party to feel that they have "won" without a high cost. Both accommodation and avoidance are styles that are used to dodge conflict, to help keep the peace, indicate a low commitment to the relationship, and are styles that women are frequently encouraged to adopt. Accommodation tries to deal with conflict quickly by giving in while avoidance tries to dodge the conflict entirely

1.3.3 Collaboration. Collaborating, the opposite of avoiding, is an assertive and cooperative style in which the individual attempts to work with others to find a solution that is amenable to all involved. This style may mean exploring others' insights to try to find a creative solution (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Collaboration is an "invitational rhetoric" that invites the other's perspective so that the parties can reach a resolution that honors both (Foss & Griffin, 1995). A collaborative approach to conflict does not conclude until both parties are reasonably satisfied and can support the solution. It also results in better decisions and greater satisfaction with the other parties to the conflict (Tutzauer & Roloff, 1988). As a result of collaboration, relationships are better, not worse, than when the conflict began. However, collaboration takes time, energy, and skill. When people have a low investment in the relationship or topic, collaboration is not worth the effort.

1.3.4 Compromise. Compromising is an intermediate assertive and cooperative style in which the individual addresses the issue directly but does not explore it fully. This style may mean seeking a quick, middle ground position (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). When compromising, parties give up some important goals to gain others. Compromise is dependent on shared power and requires trade-offs and exchanges (Folger

et al., 1993), because if the other party is perceived as powerless, no compelling reason to compromise exists. Compromise means a middle ground between oneself and the other, and involves a moderated and balanced concern for self with regard for the other. This style assumes equal power on each side and allows each side to address the issue. Because each party is seldom completely equal, this style may often favor one party to the detriment of the other. It is also possible that each party gives up so much to achieve a compromise that each side has a "lose/lose" feeling.

1.3.5 Avoidance. Avoiding is an unassertive and uncooperative style in which the individual, by not addressing the conflict issue, does not immediately pursue personal concerns or the concerns of others. This style might take the form of postponing or withdrawing (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). Avoidance can be useful and appropriate when 1) open communication is not an integral part of the system (whether family or organization); 2) one does not want to invest the energy to "work through" the conflict to reach accommodation with the other party; 3) the cost of confrontation is too high (Van de Vliert, 1985); or 4) a person hasn't yet learned to engage in collaborative conflict management (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998). When the avoider is in a subordinate position this style can be a useful protective mechanism. If avoidance is based on only one party's preference, the range of possible responses from the other party is limited and can serve to let conflict "fester without being aired." As Hocker and Wilmot conclude, avoidance "usually preserves the conflict and sets the stage for a later explosion or backlash" (Hocker & Wilmot, 1998, p. 140).

1.4 Workshop Development

The conflict management workshop followed guidelines broadly drawn from Deborah Weider-Hatfield's (1981) article on teaching conflict management communication skills. Revisions made to this basic approach involved modifying the content and scope to better fit high school freshmen and sophomores. For example, the class involved more experiential exercises and a minimum of lecture time (approximately 20 minutes). This was in keeping with the hands-on nature of the class, as well as requests that were made in the focus group. Participants in the focus group expressly stated that they wanted a class that would give them experience and practice time dealing with conflict situations and not just "boring lectures." The format of the class consisted of identifying conflict styles, the benefits of conflict, learning about the different conflict styles, short reports, and hands-on activities. Experiential activities included role-playing, observational activities, and discussion. All activities were geared toward adolescent learning styles.

The broad goal of the class was to help students learn that they are part of the transaction of communication and that as a partner in the communication they have the power to influence the direction that communication takes. This focus allowed them to see themselves as having choices in how they will interact with others and that by having the ability to choose, they become more empowered.

The objective of the program was for students to understand and practice the basic skills of conflict management. Instruction consisted of two 80 minute classes that were aimed at achieving the following more specific goals:

1. Introduce students to different conflict styles and have students identify their accustomed conflict style.

2. Understand the concept of active listening and practice skills to learn active listening skills

3. Understand the importance of expressing feelings constructively by using effective "I" messages

4. Identify and define interpersonal problems before they result in open conflict

1.4.1 Day One

Goals: To have students become familiar with the facilitator, take the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, identify their accustomed conflict style and become familiar with basic conflict management concepts.

10 Minutes: I was introduced by the teacher, followed by a short self introduction explaining why I had created the two day seminar, as well as my connection to the class through my daughter. Very little information was given to the students about the concept and goal of the class, as I did not want them influenced by any statements I made prior to their completing the instrument.

15 Minutes: Students were given 15 minutes to take the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Basic instructions about how to take the test were discussed, as well as attached to the front of the instrument (see Appendix A). Aside from basic instructions, no discussion of conflict management preceded the pre-test. I also explained that I did not want them to collaborate since there was no correct answer and each student's

answers would be as individual as the test-taker. Students who finished first were asked to sit at their desk quietly while engaging in an activity of their choice. Having students complete a conflict management style questionnaire at the beginning of the unit helped them to understand how their approaches toward conflict influenced their communicative behavior when managing conflict situations.

10 Minutes: After self scoring the instrument following the written instructions, each student was given time to read a one page overview of the conflict management styles used by the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Included on the page was a graphical representation of the conflict styles (see Figure 1) with one axis representing concern for self, the other representing concern for others and the relationship. Explaining the graph helped students to understand each conflict style and what effect it had on their conflict. It also allowed students to see that they could move anywhere in the graph, be flexible in their conflict management style, and use a different style to achieve a different outcome.

30 Minutes: A short lecture about interpersonal conflict ensued that concerned with Wilmot and Hocker's (1998) definition of conflict as well as types of conflict, myths about conflict, constructive and destructive conflict, understanding conflict as a process, and the five conflict management styles. Conflict was discussed using examples that were provided by the students. Students were encouraged to notice if they used one or two styles exclusively, no matter what conflict situation they encountered. It was suggested that they might want to consider broadening their repertoire by using a different conflict style. I stressed that each conflict style is a choice made when one is a

particular conflict situation and that different conflict situations often elicit different choices. Importantly, if a person tends to use the same conflict style for each situation he or she can choose to make other choices and use a different conflict style. I also discussed unresolved conflicts and stressed that some conflicts cannot be resolved. People can have very strong views on a subject and can't be convinced to change their mind. If each side is convinced of their argument, the sides may decide to agree to disagree. At the close of the class I gave the students a take home activity that asked them to voluntarily identify and write about an interpersonal conflict between two people that they had had in the past or were currently experiencing. They were also asked to identify the conflict management style they used. The conflict scenario homework was to be used in the next class.

1.4.2 Day Two

Goals: Reinforce previous class lecture material using experiential exercises, practice using listening skills and "I" messages, practice skills to use in real life situations, and re-take and self grade the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. **10 Minutes:** To encourage participation quickly, class began with a fun activity, a listening game that was a variation of the old "telephone game." Instead of a word I spoke a phrase into one student's ear who then repeated it to the next student and so on until the final student said the phrase. The game engendered relaxation and trust, and provided a forum for discussion about how messages can be distorted and that often what we hear is not what was said.

20 Minutes: Before students separated into dyads to act out the conflict scenario they had written for homework, I discussed active listening and "I" messages. Both these techniques are important skills in conflict management. A sheet detailing basic techniques of active listening and how to send a strong message without blaming or accusing the other using "I" messages were given to students. Discussion and practice of these techniques ensued. After students had a basic understanding of the above techniques, students then took out their personal conflict scenario. They then reenacted the scenario using a different conflict style. Doing this made the students identify the conflict style they had used originally. Choosing a different conflict style enabled them to see that they had a choice about how to react to conflict. Several students who had written about a very quick conflict were able to practice several different conflict styles and see a different outcome to the conflict each time. Basic techniques of active listening and constructing "I" messages, as well as importance of "I" messages in communicating and resolving conflicts, were also discussed.

45 Minutes:. To reinforce earlier lessons, a dyad volunteered to recreate a conflict scenario in front of the entire class. I opened a discussion by asking students to use their new information about conflict styles to suggest different ways that this dyad could approach a similar conflict in the future. Spirited discussions ensued in all five classes on the issue of a "safe conflict style," as their conflict scenarios were often with those in authority. The use of a more collaborative conflict style was discussed which would allow students to "speak their truths" while listening and respecting the other person's viewpoint. The idea that some conflicts cannot be resolved, which did not mean the

failure of the relationship, was also reinforced. People can have very strong views on a subject and sometimes can't be convinced to change their minds. It was also stressed that the skills they were learning could be used in the future, as conflict is an inevitable part of life. Each student then retook the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument and self graded it. Discussion ensued about changes each student had made in their preferred conflict style

1.5 Research Question.

The purpose of this study was to develop a conflict management skills workshop for adolescents and to assess its effect among students enrolled in a secondary school health class. Effectiveness of the workshop was assessed by soliciting students' responses to a standard instrument designed to index one's preferred style for addressing conflict in interpersonal communication situations. It was expected that the workshop would result in a shift in students' choices of conflict management styles but because the nature of that shift was impossible to predict this research posed a broad research question: RQ1: How does participation in the conflict management skills workshop change students styles for addressing conflict in interpersonal communication?

Chapter 2

Research Methodologies

The purpose of this study was to determine if teaching a short course in conflict management would improve adolescents' conflict management ability. The long term goal was that if this study demonstrated that learning had taken place, the workshop could be used in the local schools to teach adolescents conflict management.

2.1 Philosophical Perspective.

All research is guided by a philosophical perspective, and making that perspective explicit provides readers with an understanding of what knowledge is for the researcher and how knowledge is obtained (Crotty, 1998). It is necessary to design research with a clear understanding of the philosophical perspective employed. Following Crotty, the epistemology and its relation to the research process are presented first. The epistemology frames the theoretical prospective, and in turn the broader methodology employed. The specific methods employed for data gathering and analysis are informed by that methodology.

2.1.1 Epistemology. Epistemology is the philosophy of knowledge, addressing the questions of what knowledge is and how it is obtained (Kvale, 2009). Epistemology addresses both the scope of knowledge and the possibilities of knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Objectivism, constructionism, and subjectivism are distinct epistemological frames. A good deal of previous research on this topic has employed an objectivist perspective. Objectivism presents knowledge as out in the world, independent from individuals.

Positivism is one theoretical perspective consistent with objectivism (Crotty, 1998). Consistent with these choices, the current study is grounded in the objectivist perspective, and in the assumptions of positivism.

2.1.2 Methodology. In describing his/her methodology, the researcher describes a broad approach to gathering and analyzing data, and argues for its value in achieving the research purpose. Given that the research question in this study concerns change over time in students' use of approaches to conflict, and because the teacher ruled out the possibility of an experimental control group, a quasi-experimental methodology was appropriate. The particular method employed to gather data was a pre-post comparison design. Because the Thomas-Kilmann instrument provides five scores for each individual, there are multiple dependent measures involved, thus the appropriate analytic technique was repeated measures, multivariate analysis of variance. These methods and methodology reflect all the assumptions of post-positivism, within the broader scope of objectivism as an epistemological stance.

2.2 Design.

The original design of the study was to be an experiment, with a control group whose members did not participate in the workshop. Using pre and post test results would have made it possible to determine if the workshop itself had caused a change in the students' learning. However, the teacher did not want to exclude any of the students, because she felt that the workshop on interpersonal conflict was too important and necessary for each student and she did not want any students to miss the workshop, hence

a control group design was not possible. The final design of the study was therefore a straightforward pre-post test design.

2.3 Measurement Instrument.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument was the measurement tool used for pre- and post–testing of all groups. The results of the survey show the repertoire of conflict handling approaches which an individual uses in conflict situations. The instrument assesses the five modes of conflict management: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. The range of possible scores for each mode is from 0 (very low) to 12 (very high use). This instrument was chosen because it allows an individual to discover their own conflict style, to learn something about other conflict styles, and because it is frequently used in research and teaching on conflict.

2.4 Participants.

The participants in the workshop were 138 students in a local public high school, both females and males, enrolled in a freshman health class. I taught two 80 minute classes with five different class periods, for a total of 160 minutes of class time for each student. The researcher's daughter had attended the health class during the previous fall semester and general discussions about teenage health issues had brought about discussion of interpersonal conflict issues. Additional discussion about these issues with the teacher indicated her willingness to allow an outside speaker to conduct a conflict workshop as part of the class curriculum.

2.5 Procedures.

Participation in the pre-and post-testing was optional; however, each student was encouraged several times to bring in their signed permission slip with their parent or guardian signature on it. Extra points were given to students who brought back a signed permission slip. The extra credit was not dependent on allowing the student to participate, but only that it was signed by the parent or guardian. Four students did not have a signed permission slip and did not take the pre or post-test, however, they did participate in the classes. Students were assured of confidentiality and these issues were addressed on the guardian permission slip. From the perspective of the researcher, anonymity was maintained by having the teacher collate the pre-and post-tests, removing the permission stapled to the top of the pre-test, and stapling the two tests together. She then sorted the tests by dividing them into male and female groupings. The collated tests were then given to the researcher who had not participated in any of the sorting, and therefore had no knowledge of students' names. Permission to do surveys among the students was solicited from the local school district administration, the principal of the school, as well as the University of Alaska Fairbanks' Institutional Research Board (IRB). The informed consent form is included in Appendix B.

The overall structure of the pre-testing and post-testing conformed to the following pattern: classes took the test during the first hour of the workshop while the post test was given during the last hour. Conducting the pre-test before any instruction in conflict management enabled the researcher to determine students' preferred conflict styles prior to the workshop. Instructions for the test were written at the top of the

instrument as well as read aloud by the researcher (see Appendix A). The written script was used to maintain consistency between classes. Participation in the workshop was not optional. Each student was required to participate as part of the classroom curriculum. If a student did not have a permission slip, they did not have to participate in the pre-and post-testing; however, they were still required to participate in the conflict management class.

The teacher introduced the researcher and discussed what the students could expect during the workshop, as well as behavior expected by the students. The researcher then introduced herself and explained that her daughter was a student at the high school and that she and a group of friends had been given the questions first to test for readability. An explanation about the general purpose of surveys and why a pre-and post test was necessary was provided. The students were then instructed on how to take the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (see Appendix A) and given approximately 15 minutes to take the test. Any questions about interpersonal communication were reserved for after the first test. The decision about how much time to give students to complete a given task was based on which tasks needed to be completed, and then fitting these into the two 80 minute classes. The actual time for each task was determined by using a group of high school students to read all the tests and instructions. The final time devoted to each task was an executive decision on the part of the researcher.

2.6 Analysis.

The Thomas-Kilmann Instrument generated five scores for each individual, hence the analysis requires a multivariate technique, in this case MANOVA. Because the instrument was employed both before and after the workshop, the data also involved a repeated measure. Following Weinfurt (2000) the repeated measure was addressed by constructing a difference variable (D) by subtracting the pre-test score of each dependent variable from the corresponding post-test score for each student. The D variable in this study is the difference between the pre and post test scores, hence five different scores for each person which were input into the MANOVA analysis with gender as the between subjects (B-S) variable.

Chapter 3

Results

Although there were 138 students who participated in the workshop, due to absences or lack of permission slips usable Thomas-Kilmann instruments for both the pre and post tests were available for only 76 students. These were coincidently evenly divided between females and males.

Table 1 presents the mean pre and post test scores and the standard deviations for females and males for each of the five conflict styles, together with the pre/post test changes and standard deviations for males and for females of each of the five responses to conflict. Scale values for each conflict style range from 1 (for very low use) to 12 (for very high use).

TABLE 1. Mean Pre and Post Test Scores

Group	Pre-Test		Post-Test		Change	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Competition-females	5.00	3.29	6.50	1.82	1.50	4.67
Competition-males	6.42	3.18	5.76	1.46	-0.58	3.89
Collaboration-females	5.52	1.62	6.02	1.88	0.50	1.77
Collaboration-males	4.65	1.66	5.76	1.51	1.10	1.82
Compromise-females	6.39	2.33	6.63	2.34	0.24	2.51
Compromise-males	6.31	1.90	6.36	2.04	0.05	2.21
Avoidance-females	6.15	1.96	5.86	2.32	-0.29	1.98
Avoidance-males	6.28	1.84	5.31	2.24	-0.97	3.89
Accommodation-females	5.84	1.91	5.78	2.19	0.05	1.52
Accommodation-males	5.55	2.39	5.94	2.75	0.39	1.76

As in chapter 2, the appropriate analytic technique for this pre-post test design was a multivariate analysis of variance on the pre-post change scores for all five dependent variables, with sex as a between-subjects variable. Analysis results revealed that the required assumptions of equality of covariance matrices and of error variances were met.

The MANOVA revealed that across all five dependent variables (conflict styles) the change between pretest and post test was not statistically significant. ($p=.145$; $\eta^2=.108$; power=.557). Overall, then, participation in a conflict management skills workshop did not change students' styles for addressing conflict in interpersonal communication.

Table 2 presents the between-subjects difference scores (females minus males) for each of the five responses to conflict. Tests for each dependent variable separately show that the female/male difference for competition was statistically significant ($p=.039$; $\eta^2 = .057$; power=.548), but that the differences for all four other styles were not statistically significant, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Between Subjects Difference. (female change score minus male change score).

Group	F/M Difference	Sig.	Power
Competition	2.08	0.039*	0.548
Collaboration	-0.61	0.146	0.305
Compromise	0.19	0.735	0.063
Avoidance	0.68	0.163	0.286
Accommodation	-0.44	0.145	0.557

* statistically significant ($p<.05$)

Figure 2 is a graphical presentation of the changes for females and males for each of the five conflict styles. Study of the figure shows that females increased in their willingness to approach conflict competitively while males decreased. With regard to their willingness to be collaborative, both females and males increased but males increased more. An important notion about female communication style is that relationship building is their preferred style based on the hegemony of our patriarchal system. According to Tannen (1996) women use "rapport-talk" whereas men tend to use "report-talk." (p. 68). The females apparently were willing to use a more male oriented conflict style beyond their socially learned communication style. Females and males increased only slightly in their use of compromise. Both females and males moved toward being less avoidant, while females increased only slightly in accommodating and males became slightly more willing to accommodate
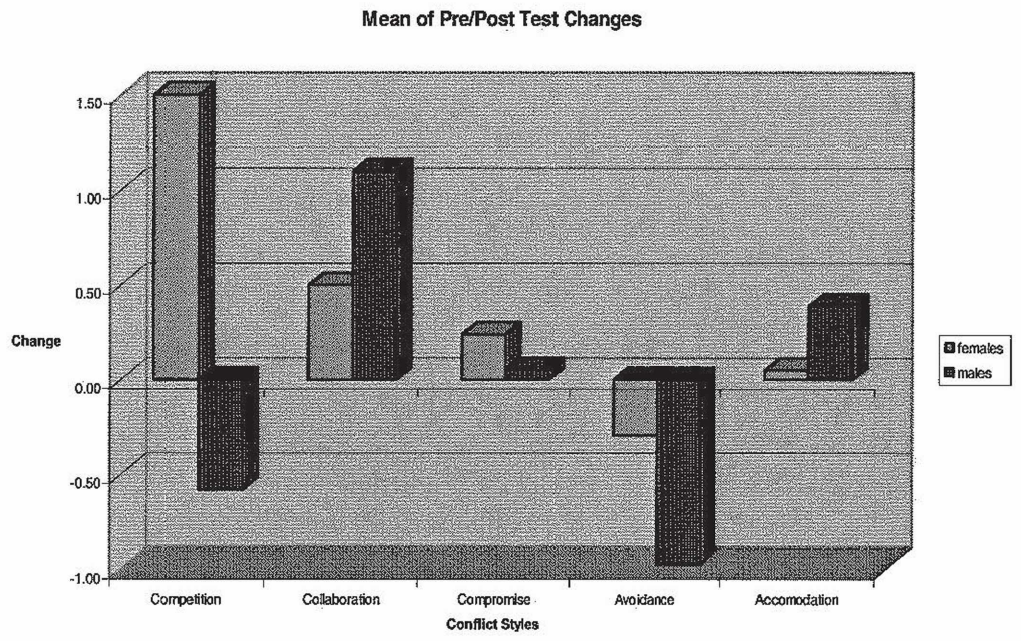
Figure 2 Styles

Chapter 4

Discussion

4.1 Overview of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if a workshop held during two 80 minute high school classes would allow adolescents to learn new conflict management styles. Consistent with common practice in the discipline, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (1974) and the five conflict styles used in that instrument became the basis for the workshop: competing, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation. The workshop introduced students to the styles, asking them to self identify their accustomed conflict style both before and after instruction. The workshop also introduced listening skills and the use of "I" language in an experiential learning setting. As discussed in chapter 1, one goal of this skills training was to help students define interpersonal problems before they resulted in open conflict and to help them manage them more proactively than they had before the workshop. The research question became: How does participation in a conflict management skills workshop change students styles for addressing conflict in interpersonal communication?

4.2 Findings

As indicated in chapter 3, the overall multivariate analysis of variance revealed that when all five dependent variables or conflict style scales were considered together, the workshop did not result in statistically significant changes in the student's willingness to employ the various conflict styles. However, further examination of the results for the

separate conflict styles revealed an interesting pattern of changes for females and males across the pre and post test evaluations: competition increased for females and decreased for males, collaboration increased for both, compromise increased slightly, avoidance increased, and accommodation decreased.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument provides a set of norms for score values for each of the five styles. The scores range between 1 and 12 and are distributed differently for each of the five styles with regard to the percentages of people scoring at or below a given score value. The original norm group was composed of managers at middle and upper levels of business and government organizations. A person's profile of scores indicates the repertoire of conflict-handling skills which they use in the conflicts they encounter.

An important point, and one stressed to the students in the conflict management workshop, is that extreme scores are not necessarily good or bad, since a particular situation may require high or low use of a given conflict-handling mode. Thus, scores indicate more about an individual's or group's conflict handling skills in a given situation.

Competition was the one conflict mode in which the difference between females and males was statistically significant. Females increased in their willingness to use competition between the pre and post test, while males decreased slightly, with a difference of 2.08. Based on the original norms for the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument, females in the workshop began with a score of 5 which is at the 40th percentile and

moved up to 6.5 which is at the 60th percentile, while males started at 6.42 in the 60th percentile and dropped slightly to 5.76, below the 50th percentile.

Collaboration showed little change for either sex. In the pretest both groups were at the 40th percentile (females: 5.52; males: 4.65). Both rose to slightly above the 50th percentile on the posttest (females: 6.02; males: 5.76). Collaboration is not a common style among adolescents, as their age and situation many times do not allow them to employ this conflict style.

Compromise is another conflict style that had almost no change for both females and males, with both groups remaining at approximately the 35th percentile (females: 6.39 to 6.63; males: 6.31 to 6.36). Verbal feedback from students indicated that they felt that as high school students interacting daily with parents and teachers they were in the position of constantly having to compromise, and indicated no willingness to learn to use this style more frequently.

Interestingly, males decreased in avoidance more than females. Males moved from the 50th percentile (6.28) in the pretest to below the 40th percentile (5.31) in the post test. Females moved from approximately the 50th percentile (6.15) to slightly below the 50th percentile (5.86). This reflects feedback from students who told me after the workshop that they had never even considered using avoidance as a conscious choice in their conflict management repertoire. In fact, many stated that they didn't have a "repertoire" of conflict handling skills; they were basically using a stimulus-response mode. They recognized that avoidance was not the best style and generally led to more conflict. Adolescents, especially males, felt they had no other resource to fall back on

than avoidance. The desire not to be seen as "unmanly" was of particular concern to males. Females felt that they had to "be in someone's face" to achieve their point in conflicts. Learning different conflict styles made adolescents more aware of their options and of the possibility of choosing which style to use in a particular conflict situation.

Accommodation stayed about the same for females and males, both being at almost 60th percentile for pre and post test (females: 5.84 to 5.78; males: 5.55 to 5.94). According to Thomas and Kilmann (1974) accommodating is unassertive and cooperative, and in doing so the individual neglects their own concerns to satisfy the concerns of the other person, with an element of self-sacrifice. Adolescence is a time of determining one's own concerns. Students told me that they felt that they constantly had to accommodate themselves to authority figures such as parents and school authorities. They were delighted to learn that they didn't always have to do so and so could avoid being resentful.

The increase in competition by females and the increase in collaboration by males indicate that some change in awareness took place during the workshop. The stereotype is that female adolescents are more prone to accommodation or avoidance. The results from the workshop indicate that at least in their own interpretation, females became more willing to be competitive. This outcome is consistent with feedback I received from female students who noted that they became aware that they were "allowed" to use competition. Importantly students conveyed to me during the workshop that they were more willing to use a different conflict style because they now had information which they had never been introduced to before about the viability of different styles. Male

students indicated through joking that they now didn't have to "bash someone's face in," as using a different style didn't indicate that they weren't "man enough" to fight.

This study suggests that a brief conflict management workshop is useful for all teens, not just those considered "at risk." This was consistent with the desire of the instructor, as well as recommendations from counselors and parents, that all students participate in a conflict management skills workshop, regardless of their having a signed permission slip.

4.3 Limitations

There were several limitations in this study that should be noted. Although research was originally conceived as a pre-post experiment, the desire of the teacher to have all students benefit from the workshop precluded that choice and the final form was a pre-post design without a control group. Also, due to lack of parent/guardian permission slips and to absences from either the first or second workshop, only 76 students were included in the final analysis. Due to the need to take time for classroom administration and for administering the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument, lack of time for instruction in conflict management was a rather severe constraint. Out of 80 minutes for each class, approximately 30 minutes were devoted to actual instruction and student interaction.

The use of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument introduces certain limitations. The instrument was developed and normed in the early 1970's. No information is available regarding the population of individuals who provided the

responses used in selecting test items for the five conflict styles. Presumably the population consisted of American adults. As a consequence, the test items may not adequately index the five conflict styles for American teenagers of the late 1990's when the date were gathered. The norms for high, middle, and low scores were established by middle and upper level managers of business and government organizations in the 1970's, many of whom were likely male. These norms need to employed with reservations in interpreting the scores of teenagers of both genders almost two decades later.

4.4 Conclusion and Implications for Future Research

Despite the constraint on instruction time, the study showed that a statistically significant change occurred in student's willingness to use one conflict style and some shift in two others. Student feedback also indicated that learning occurred with regard to the four overall goals for the conflict management workshop. That is, after instruction in the five conflict styles, in active listening, and in the use of "I" messages, followed by experiential learning activities, student feedback indicated increase awareness and understanding of these key skills.

Unexpectedly, students also reported that they found the conflict management skills workshop useful because they had never been exposed to the idea that they had a choice in conflict situations. As they learned about the nature of conflict they discovered that conflict is neither good nor bad, because it is part of being human and therefore inevitable, like the weather. What was entirely new to many of them was that even

though conflict is inevitable, they had a choice in their response to conflict. Many stated that they felt newly empowered just having this information. Because adolescence is a time for learning the skills necessary to adult living, it is troubling that these adolescents lacked this awareness. How can we expect them to become productive adults if the most basic skills of relationship engagement, those of conflict management, are unknown to them?

Further research in this area is needed to determine how adolescents respond to conflict and the best way to teach these skills. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, although the most widely used conflict instrument, is based on responses from adults who are managers and thus have an ability and responsibility to make conflict decisions that adolescents don't have the authority or responsibility to make. A new or reissued instrument and new norms would be useful in such research.

Ideally this workshop material would be taught in the school district as a semester or half semester elective class and expanded to cover effective interpersonal communication, not just dealing with conflict. However, conflict was the area identified by the teens (in the focus group) as that area having the most pressing need. If 60 minutes of actual instruction in conflict styles, along with instruction in active listening and "I" messages, was able to effect some change in how adolescents understand conflict management, then devoting more time to a workshop of this type is likely to result in even greater change in adolescents' conflict management abilities.

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Appendix A

Instructions

Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can. Each question has two answers. Some of the questions may seem to ask the same thing over again, that is OK, just choose whichever answer seems most appropriate for you. Don't be concerned about answering the question "correctly". Your answers are about you, to give you insight about yourself.

As you answer these questions think about yourself in a situation with a parent, teacher, or some other person in authority. For each pair, circle either "A" or "B" to describe how you would most likely respond in these situations.

1. A. There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.
    B. There are times when I try to stress those things upon which we both agree.

2. A. I try to find a compromise solution.
    B. I try to deal with all of his/her and my concerns.

3. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
    B. I might try to soothe the other person's feeling and preserve our relationship.

4. A. I try to find a compromise solution.
    B. I sometimes sacrifice my own wishes for the wishes of the other person.

5. A. I consistently seek the other's help in working out a solution
    B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless anxiety and tension.

6. A. I try to avoid creating unpleasantness for myself
    B. I try to win my position.

7. A. I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think it over.
    B. I will let other people have some of their positions if they let me have some of mine.

8. A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
    B. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.

9. A. I feel that differences are not always worth worrying about.
    B. I make some effort to get my way.

10. A. I am firm in pursing my goals.
    B. I try to find a compromise solution.

11. A. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
    B. I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.

12. A. I sometimes avoid taking positions that would create controversy.
    B. I will let the other person have some of his/her positions if he/she lets me have some of mine.

13. A. I propose a middle–ground.
    B. I press to get my points made.

14. A. I tell the other person my ideas and ask for his/hers.
    B. I try to show the other person the logic and benefits of my position.

15.   A. I might try to soothe the other's feelings and preserve our relationship.
      B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid tensions.

16.   A. I try not to hurt the other's feelings.
      B. I try to convince the other person of the merits of my position.

17.   A. I am usually firm in pursuing my goals.
      B. I try to do what is necessary to avoid useless tensions.

18.   A. If it makes other people happy, I might let them maintain their views.
      B. I will let other people have some of their positions if they let me have some of mine.

19.   A. I attempt to get all concerns and issues immediately out in the open.
      B. I try to postpone the issue until I have had some time to think it over.

20.   A. I attempt to immediately work through our differences.
      B. I try to find a fair combination of gains and losses for both of us.

21.   A. In approaching negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.
      B. I always lean toward a direct discussion of the problem.

22.   A. I try to find a position that is intermediate between his/hers and mine.
      B. I assert my wishes.

23.   A. I am very often concerned with satisfying all our wishes.
      B. There are times when I let others take responsibility for solving the problem.

24.   A. If the other's position seems very important to him/her, I would try to meet his/her wishes.
      B. I try to get the other person to settle for a compromise.

25.   A. I try to show the other person the logic and benefits of my position.
      B. In approaching negotiations, I try to be considerate of the other person's wishes.

26.   A. I propose a middle ground.
      B. I am nearly always concerned with satisfying all our wishes.

27.   A. I sometimes avoid taking positions that would create controversy.
      B. If it makes other people happy, I might let them maintain their views.

28.   A. I am usually firm in pursing my goals.
      B. I usually seek the other's help in working out a solution.

29.   A. I propose a middle ground.
      B. I feel that differences in opinion are not always worth worrying about.

30.   A. I try not to hurt the other's feelings.
      B. I always share the problem with the other person so that we can work it out.

Appendix B

Student Number:_____

Hello, my name is Debra DeLong. I'm a graduate student in the

Department of Communication from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Mrs.

Anderson has invited me into her class for two periods to discuss

communication.

I'd like you to fill out this survey. It will be used to help you learn some

of the ideas I will talk about and the data from it will be used to help me decide

if this class has been an effective learning tool for students.

Your participation is voluntary. I'd like you to sign below to indicate your

willingness to participate. You may withdraw at anytime. Your responses are

private and I will not be able to find how any particular person filled out this

survey, because Mrs. Anderson will remove the top sheet so that your student

number is not associated with your answers.

The final page is a copy of this front page that you may keep for

your records.

If you have any questions or concerns about the survey or these classes

please feel free to contact me, Debra DeLong (451-6766, ftdmd@uaf.edu), Mrs.

Anderson (456-7794, gjandrsn@northstar.k12.ak.us) or my professor, Robert

B. Arundale (474-6799, ffrba@uaf.edu).

Thank you!

Signature:_____