

WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE:
CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEER MEDIATION PROGRAMS IN MIDDLE
AND HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE U.S. AND THEIR
ABILITY TO SERVE STUDENTS FROM
DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

by
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“What We Have Here is a Failure to Communicate: Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Programs in Middle and High Schools in the U.S. and Their Ability to Serve Students from Diverse Backgrounds,” a thesis prepared by Tiana Cadye Povenmire-Kirk in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science degree in the Interdisciplinary Studies Program: Individualized Program. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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In this thesis, I examine the success of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in U.S. middle and high schools. I investigate the ability of these programs to serve students from diverse backgrounds. Using multidisciplinary research literature, I discuss five factors that impact potential communication, conflict, and its resolution: gender, race, culture, disability and power. I explain how each of these factors intersects

with one another and with the communication experiences of students. I describe the educational system as an existing institution in an excellent position to effect significant social change. I review the success of current programs used in schools and discuss their sensitivity to and appropriateness in serving students from diverse backgrounds. Finally, I make recommendations for how to modify programs and curricula to be inclusive of all students and how to utilize our current educational system as a vehicle for transformative social change.

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CHAPTER I

CONFLICT AND THE VARIABLES THAT AFFECT IT

Introduction

On a playground in a Massachusetts elementary school, a group of girls refuse to let one little girl play because her clothes are older and not the latest style; she lives in a poor area of town. She is hurt and angry because she feels excluded and frustrated. She sits alone on the swings, watching after the girls as they jump rope and call out childhood rhymes.

Across the country, in Oregon, a young boy in elementary school is teased by classmates because he speaks English with a thick accent and has dark skin. The boys push him against the walls as they pass him in the halls and mutter racial epithets under their breath. He feels helpless and alone.

At a high school in Wisconsin, a young woman is trying to study in the library. A young man walks by and perches on the desk, commenting on her body and things he'd like to do to her. She has heard this all before and tightens the top of her blouse around her neck. The young man finally leaves when the librarian comes and tells them to get to

work or go away. The young woman continues to study, but is frustrated, angry and distracted. She feels helpless to address the situation.

A boy with Down syndrome in Texas is lured by classmates to an abandoned farmhouse. They beat him up, strip him of his clothes, and leave him scared, bruised, and alone. A search party finds him the next morning. His wounds heal, but he is terrified and refuses to go back to school. His parents begin a lawsuit against the school district.

Near a college campus in Georgia, a young man is walking home from a concert by a local band. A group of young men jump him and push him into an alley. They beat him severely and leave him for dead because they believe him to be homosexual. He dies in intensive care in the middle of the night. The community goes into shock. His family mourns the loss of their son.

Each of these stories plays itself out across the country with chilling frequency. Each of these situations share a common thread – the individuals being targeted are perceived by the perpetrators as being different and somehow less valuable than themselves. The perpetrators do not identify with, understand or empathize with the victims.

Herein, I argue that the lack of empathy illustrated in the above vignettes is the result of institutionalized *-isms*. Institutionalized *sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, classism* and value-based hegemony create systems in which miscommunication not only will occur, but is likely to happen because of the lack of understanding and empathy inherent in a society where we measure value by perceived group membership. Misunderstanding creates a lack of empathy, which enables discrimination and can lead to violence. I assert

that the educational system in the United States is in a prime position to explicitly teach the necessary skills to ameliorate conflicts caused by misunderstandings and to help instill empathy in our students. In this paper, I focus on educational conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in middle and high schools in the United States. I seek to answer the following questions:

- 1) What factors or variables exist around difference and group membership and how do they interact with one another in terms of communication and conflict?
- 2) How do existing programs of conflict resolution and peer mediation in the United States address issues of difference, discrimination and bias?
- 3) How do these programs help to build empathy and understanding between Individuals from different backgrounds?
- 4) How can these programs be adapted to better meet the needs of the increasingly diverse student population?

In order to ensure a meaningful discussion of such a multi-faceted topic, I will begin with an introduction to conflict and a brief history of conflict resolution. In this first chapter, I propose a model of conflict as a continuum. In Chapter II, I will identify and discuss five primary variables (gender, race, culture, disability, and power) that may impact the relative success of communication between two or more parties. I will discuss how these variables interact with and depend upon one another. In Chapter III, I contend that the current educational system is in an excellent position to promote and enact social change with regards to empathy and understanding. Therefore, I will explore conflict

resolution and peer mediation programs currently in use in schools throughout the United States and their efficacy. In Chapter IV, I discuss suggestions from the research to improve the development and implementation of more mobile conflict resolution and peer mediation programs. I conclude in Chapter V with concrete strategies to help address issues of bias and build empathy and provide a hopeful glimpse of the future and the potential long-term effects of implementing conflict resolution programs. I have included a glossary of terms, offering operational definitions, in Appendix B.

Conflict

Conflict is a serious disagreement or argument (Oxford, 2002), including problems and disagreements that are the result of differing wishes or needs (Bickmore, 2002). Conflict is generally understood to be an inevitable part of the human experience that can be both a negative and positive force (Deutsch, 1993; Bickmore, 2002). It is important to take note; often, when dealing with conflict, citizens and educators alike will ignore conflict's potential to create social and individual change and therefore, to be a positive force. The under-appreciated potential of conflict to be positively transformative is compounded by society's tendency to focus attention (and funding) on the negative impact of unresolved conflict. Such attention is usually found in the form of rehabilitation or punitive retribution.

Given that conflict is inevitable in human interactions, we must create a lens through which we can conceptualize conflict as positive and transformative in nature. This is crucial to our ability to peacefully coexist. An increased understanding of conflict, how it occurs, and how it can be constructive is essential in the development of

educational programs that may seek to decrease violence in the school community.

Conflict and communication are affected by myriad factors. I will, through an interdisciplinary review of the literature, identify five variables that impact conflict and communication. I use the term *interdependent variables*, because each one can both affect and be affected by the others.

Interdependent Variables that Affect Conflict

I have identified five primary variables that affect conflict and communication: *gender, race, culture, disability, and power*. Gender, race, culture and disability are each both internal and external variables, meaning that they can depend on either the individual's interpretation or internal reality, or on society's established norms. Power is an external variable that can be internalized. It occurs outside of the individual and depend largely upon social constructs, but can become integrated into an individual's functional reality over time.

Although these interdependent variables affect conflict and its resolution, they are but facets of the multi-dimensional human experience. Before commencing this part of the discussion, it is imperative that we heed Reeder's (1996) warning that in research, we often reduce human beings to one classifiable aspect of their total selves, and then use this singular aspect to explain the behavior of a given subject, as well as the findings of our research. The point I want to emphasize is that, by increasing our knowledge and understanding of these variables, we will increase both our awareness of difference and our valuation of individual and collective contributions. I focus our attention then, on these aspects, in order to increase our ability to develop more inclusive conflict resolution

programs, including conflict resolution curricula, and its ability to be embedded within regular educational material.

The Continuum of Conflict and Violence

Diller and Moule (2005) argue that prejudice is stimulated by basic human behavior; identifying with a group of people that one perceives to be similar in some regard is an innate human trait. They further describe that what is perceived as different is often perceived as a threat.

The tendency to separate oneself from those who are different intensifies the threat because separation limits communication and thus heightens the possibility of misunderstanding. With separation, knowledge of the other becomes more limited, and this limited knowledge seems to invite distortion, the creation of myths about members of other groups, and the attribution of negative characteristics and intent to them. (p. 32)

I argue that it is this perception of difference, along multiple lines, that disables communication process and enables discrimination and violence to occur. I maintain that misunderstandings left unattended and unresolved can lead to the alienation and dehumanization of those who we perceive do not understand *us* and as those *we* do not understand. The less *perceived* common ground between individuals and/or groups, the less identification with, and compassion for, the “other.” Consequently, conflict and violence exist on a continuum, with empathy and constructive resolution of conflict at one end and discrimination at the other, with the extreme end being violence. Figure 1 illustrates this model (Appendix A). The more one identifies with another, the more in-group their interactions, the less likely conflict is and the more chance empathy will develop between the two people. Conversely, the more one feels different from another, the more out-group their interactions and the more likely conflict is to occur. The

progression from one end of the continuum to the other is neither gradual, nor predictable, and often takes place in enormous leaps. Lincoln (2001) argues that abusive and controlling actions result from a lack of respect and an attitude of indifference and intolerance toward others. The greater the perceived difference between one group or individual and the group or individual perceived as *other*, the greater chance of bias-related incidents.

The propensity to concentrate on differences and to classify individuals and groups by one or more salient characteristics, rather than to view them as individuals who share some, but not all attributes, further segregates individuals and groups. Prutzman (1994) maintains that there is an overlap between bias-related incidents and those we label as hate crimes, identifying bias-related incidents as including everything from name calling to physical assault based upon perceived group membership. Prutzman (1994) also emphasizes the importance of school conflict resolution programs in responding to bias and decreasing the potential for conflict and violence, while increasing tolerance and understanding of differences. Such programs are poised in perfect position to move individuals from the discrimination and violence end of the conflict continuum to the empathy end. By helping students find similarities between themselves and others, educational programs can build empathy and increase the likelihood of harmony and resolution when conflict does occur.

How large is the problem of violence in the schools? In 1995, Merina reported that in a given hour in the United States: 2,000 students are attacked on school grounds, 900 teachers are threatened, and 40 teachers are assaulted. Every day, 100,000 kids bring

guns to school, injuring 40 students. Of all public school students questioned, 44 percent reported personal experiences with confrontations or angry scenes at school. One quarter of all students questioned reported having been in fights. Almost ten years later, a nationwide survey of high school students conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2004) indicates that 33% of high school students report being in a physical fight at least once in the preceding 12 months. 17% of students reported carrying a weapon (e.g. gun, knife, or club) to school within the previous 30 days. Such incidents are not limited to high school; Bunting and Reising (1996) report that such incidents are prevalent in middle schools as well as high schools. In fact, an estimated 30% of students in 6th to 10th grades in the United States were involved in bullying as either the bully, the target, or both (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). As school shootings like Thurston and Columbine (Leary, Kowalski, Smith, & Phillips, 2003) have illustrated, bullying and school violence, if left unresolved, can have deadly consequences.

The Escalation and Resolution of Conflict

Conflict exists along its continuum and, if left unresolved, escalates. Moreover, as incidents such as the shootings at Littleton, Thurston, and Columbine show, conflict can become deadly without warning; it does not progress predictably from one end of the continuum to the other (Verlinden, Hersen, & Thomas, 2000). With the boom in technology and the rapid increase in communication media, there are more opportunities for both communication and miscommunication than ever before. These factors, among

others, emphasize the increasing need for effective conflict resolution education and training.

The growth of the population and increased interactions between individuals from different backgrounds, without any structures in place to increase empathy and understanding, increases the opportunity for misunderstandings and conflict not only to arise, but also to escalate. Messing (1993) points out that as options and decisions necessitated by family, economic and social stresses decrease, conflicts increase. With increasing stresses and decreasing choices come more opportunities for misunderstandings which, if left unchecked, can turn into conflict. This reality highlights the need for more effective conflict resolution training and education. Due to and increase in conflict across the country, states are developing conflict resolution processes in an effort to address disputes that are clogging already over-burdened legal systems (Messing, 1993). Criminal and civil-related conflicts are only the tip of the iceberg. Bias-related incidents have increased markedly since 1980 and *over 70 percent of all bias-related incidents are perpetrated by people under age 19* (Prutzman, 1994). Consequently, there is an obvious need for early intervention at a level below the civil and criminal court system.

Conflict resolution is no longer a state- or county-level response to disputes. Today, many schools have implemented conflict resolution and/or peer mediation programs, not only to resolve conflict, but as violence prevention strategies (Townley, 1994). If educators and citizens can prevent conflict from escalating into violence, perhaps, we can also create space for conflict and its resolution to become transformative

and empowering. How do we accomplish this change in perspectives? The answer likely lies in conflict resolution education. Deutsch (1993) points out that conflicts are inevitable, but that the ability to handle them constructively facilitates both the survival of and the intensifying of cooperative relationships.

A Brief History of Conflict Resolution

The structure of conflict resolution, as we know it today, has its roots in the labor movement (Bush & Folger, 1994). Conflict is frequently characterized by power discrepancy between the disputants; one party is more powerful or has more options than does the other (Messing, 1993). Exactly such a power imbalance spurred forth the roots of conflict resolution in the form of mediation, during the early phases of the labor movement.

The utilization of mediation and conflict resolution among labor organizers and employers was so successful that the legal system began its own development of what is currently known as alternative dispute resolution or ADR. ADR is the use of an alternative to the traditional court process such as arbitration, mediation or negotiation. ADR aims to settle civil cases prior to going to trial, using informal sessions with magistrates or judges to encourage voluntary agreement (Messing, 1993).

Conflict resolution refers to a set of skills that can be employed by an individual or team in communicative settings. These skills increase empathy, reduce the opportunities for misunderstanding, and help clarify the intentions and needs of the parties involved in the communication. According to Carter (2002), conflict resolution can lessen social tension, a precursor to violence, and has productive resolution as its

goal. More specifically, as the conflict resolution education movement continues to grow, the term *conflict resolution education* refers to programs that "...teach students to use alternatives to violence when resolving their interpersonal and personal problems.

...Such programs typically strive to provide knowledge about violence and conflict, to increase students' understanding of their own and others' feelings, and to teach students the personal and interpersonal skills necessary to avoid violence." (Peterson & Skiba, 2000, p. 127)

Mediation, conflict resolution and other branches that have evolved from the modest roots of the labor movement have all been utilized and customized for many situations outside of the legal system and labor unions.

Descriptions of Different Branches of Conflict Resolution

Here, I will discuss the different methods of conflict resolution that have developed as a result of the success of such strategies within the judicial system and labor movement. Common definitions that are shared and respected by researchers and scholars are useful in discussions of theory and practice. I conclude Chapter I with operational definitions that describe the following branches that will be discussed.

Arbitration is described as compulsory or voluntary submission of a dispute to a neutral third party who renders a decision that can be either non-binding or binding (each party is legally required to follow the decision of the arbitrator. Both parties have a chance to present arguments and evidence (Messing, 1993)

Unlike arbitration, *conciliation* is not legally binding, and is not always decision driven, i.e., conciliation could take place between divorced parents attempting to

communicate about decisions in the life of their child. Conciliation refers to a process that is both informal and voluntary, and involves a third party, whose purpose is to facilitate communication by carrying information between the parties, helping to lower tensions and providing a safe meeting environment and technical assistance when necessary (Messing, 1993).

Another practice, *negotiation*, doesn't even involve a third party. Instead, in negotiation, the parties voluntarily gather to bargain or problems-solve directly with one another until an agreeable settlement of the issues has been reached. (Carter, 2002; Messing, 1993)

Mediation is intervention or facilitation of conflict resolution by a designated and impartial third party in which the mediator helps the disputing parties to find a mutually agreed upon resolution to their (Townley, 1995). There are a number of factors that researchers have agreed are necessary for effective mediation to occur (Messing, 1993; Prutzman, 1994; Lincoln, 2001; Bush & Folger, 1994). First, it is imperative that the mediator be as neutral as possible, neither directly involved in, nor affected by either the conflict or its resolution. Next, it is important that all parties agree to and understand confidentiality. In addition to assisting the parties to understand and agree to confidentiality, the mediator must also ensure that the parties understand and agree to other rules, which, specific to each mediation program, will be discussed below. A third point presented in the literature is that there are times when mediation is not appropriate. Prutzman (1994) suggests that one of the purposes of mediation is to level the playing field, so to speak, in situations in which a discrepancy exists between the parties' access

to power or resources. In situations in which the power discrepancy is more than the mediator can compensate for, or in situations in which a crime has been committed against one party by the other, mediation is not appropriate. It is vital that the mediator maintain his or her impartiality. As Lincoln (2001) advises, "Casting blame for the situation, giving advice, or looking for witnesses to corroborate conflicting events should never occur during mediation sessions" (p. 37). Another important responsibility of the mediator is to help the disputing parties understand each other's interests and positions and to explain the difference between the two. Messing (1993) describes a position as a statement of what each party wants.

Focus on Education

Although mediation occurs within and through a variety of contexts, this paper focuses on peer mediation programs and conflict resolution education programs in middle and high schools in the United States. Such programs are usually school-based and involve trained student mediators facilitating the resolution of disputes between their fellow students. (Bickmore, 2002; Peterson & Skiba, 2000)

An effective way to instill conflict resolution and mediation skills is through systems already in place for bringing people together and imparting knowledge and tradition: schools, community centers, etc. In the efficacy studies that have been conducted, conflict resolution and peer mediation programs have shown excellent success. The research suggests that we include more information, skills and training in our curricula. In fact, one might suggest that we restructure all of the curricula to automatically include, highlight and involve conflict resolution and peer mediation skills.

Schools, which have long been places where conflict was viewed as negative, are in a position to be catalysts of social change. McHenry (2000) advises that educators may have to take measures that seem counter to their initial impulses.

The instinct to avoid conflict, which can be prevalent in schools, may derail the very experience that offers the greatest potential for learning... instead, educators must emphasize and engage students in responses to conflict that are nonviolent and creative and that promote the cause of peace (p. 225).

If we train students not just in avoidance tactics, but in active peacemaking and peacekeeping skills, it naturally follows that violence will decrease. A crucial component of this skill set is that of perspective taking and empathy building. As conflict resolution becomes a positive catalyst of social change, communication becomes clearer and empathy becomes a social value.

Within the context of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in schools today, *conflict resolution* is primarily comprised of skills for negotiating conflict as an involved party. According to Townley (1994), the skills and knowledge involved in such training include cooperative learning, constructive controversy, empathy training, effective interpersonal communication, and intercultural dispute resolution. For the majority of programs, instruction and discussion includes topics like the appreciating diversity, identifying feelings, managing anger, coping with stress, and using conflict resolution skills and tactics. Successful programs also give information regarding the prevalence of violence and conflict. (Peterson & Skiba, 2000)) The focus of such programs is to communicate effectively and to prevent unresolved conflict from escalating into violence on an individual and group level.

Although these programs are successful (see Chapter III), the crux of this paper is how well such programs address needs of diverse populations and bridge the gaps between individuals who perceive themselves to be members of different groups. Prior to looking at the success of these programs, I want to first explore the areas of difference from which group membership is often forged. No discussion of conflict resolution would be complete without first investigating the primary factors that affect both communication and conflict. We will move to Chapter II for an in depth discussion of these factors: Gender, Culture, Language, Media, Power and Education.

CHAPTER II

INTERDEPENDENT VARIABLES IN COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT

Introduction

In the field of statistics, the idea of independent and dependent variables arises from the theory that independent variables affect dependent variables and not the other way around. The concept of variables denotes that either can be changed or occurs along a continuum – rather than existing as a static entity. In this chapter, I use the term *interdependent variables* to describe the five main factors that impact conflict and communication between people and the interdependent relationship between these factors. This list of variables is by no means exhaustive, but seeks to address primary areas of difference along which invisible lines are drawn, designating group membership based upon a given characteristic. These areas of difference are: gender, race, culture, disability, and power.

I argue that these *variables* should be given significant consideration in the research and development of general curricula as well as conflict resolution and peer mediation programs. It is also prudent to caution against placing too much emphasis on any of these variables. Reeder (1996) cautions that it is unnatural to divide people into

seemingly opposing groups based on any single facet of their total being. It is important to note that *perceptions* play a crucial role in communication, conflict and its resolution. Both one's own perceptions and the perceptions of others in terms of where one lies within these invisible lines have an impact on communication and conflict resolution.

Why difference? Why these differences? Our assessments of a situation are based upon information we take in through our senses. Human nature is to separate stimuli based on perceptible differences; when dealing with people, we rely primarily on the differences we can see and then on the differences we can hear (Diller & Moule, 2005). I have chosen to discuss the factors uncovered in the research in this order because we make immediate assumptions about people based upon our perceptions of their gender, race, culture, ability level, and power level. Before beginning this exploration, a vital caveat is necessary – no single characteristic (gender, race, culture, disability, and power) or combination thereof is linked consistently to any specific communication characteristics or set of skills. Indeed, there are always more within group differences than there are between group differences (Meltzoff, 2001). This fact doesn't stop us from trying to assume that we know things about individual, based upon our perception of their group membership. Across all races, cultures, ability levels, and power positions, all human beings have gender, and assumptions are made based upon the perception of such. We begin our discussion here.

Gender

Although any two women may communicate as differently as any comparable man and woman, gender-linked stereotypes abound across cultures and around the world

(Kirtley & Weaver, 1999). Perception of gender difference allows in-group and out-group behavior, which can lead to discrimination and conflict along the continuum. Moreover, although the forced dichotomous categories of gender are socially accepted as primary organizing principles, they are, in fact, socially constructed rather than scientifically discovered. As ideas that have aged since their construction, a critical review of their validity and utility in current society is in order and, in this case, long overdue. Theorists and researchers alike have spent the past three decades calling for a reexamination of the constructs of gender and sex and a discussion of gender as existing along a continuum, rather than as a dichotomy (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In spite of the growing body of research on gender and gender theory, researchers still insist on researching gender difference, and, more importantly, ascribing differences between groups to the differences in their genders. Stereotypes about gender in communication and conflict abound.

Disappointments are likely to occur when expectations are based upon irrational or inaccurate stereotypes, and because stereotypes never apply accurately to all individuals in a given group, stereotypical expectations are a recipe for communication disasters. Gender, like all the variables discussed here, is plagued with stereotypes. “Inaccurate sex-based stereotypes – particularly when they differ between the sexes – can serve to reduce the communication effectiveness of cross-sex interaction in a variety of contexts” (Nicoreta & Rancer, 1994, p. 297). The authors proceed to suggest that this is especially pertinent in contexts in which sex-based power roles are more clearly defined and enacted, such as family and organizational contexts. The learning and internalizing of

stereotypes happens early on in life. Sims, Hutchinson, and Taylor (1998) found through observations of children aged 3 – 5 years old that, even at this early age, children already demonstrate gender-segregated behavior.

The study of gender-based communication distinctions has been around since the 1970s (Snowden, 1999). In her 1990 book, *You Just Don't Understand*, Tannen outlines gendered differences in communication style and techniques and speculates as to the causes of such differences. I present a summary of her main theories here. Briefly, Tannen (1990) asserts that men and women communicate differently because they are socialized differently – nurture versus nature. Tannen predicts that men will have fewer close friends than women, that women and girls will tend to talk in dyads, while boys tend to engage in activities in small groups. She further suggests that men discuss less intimate topics than do women, and that women are more emotionally oriented and aware, whereas men are more problem-solution oriented. Researchers have spent more than a decade attempting to unpack, replicate or disprove Tannen's findings.

Oxley, Dzindolet and Miller (2002), found that some of Tannen's claims were supported, in that men discussed less intimate topics than did the women. This same study's findings contradicted Tannen's other ideas – men and women did not differ in the number of close friends they have or in their likelihood to offer assistance to troubled friends. In an earlier study, Kunkel and Burleson (1999) found that men and women do differ in how they perform emotionally supportive and comforting behavior. They also found that "...women tend to be more emotionally sensitive and expressive than men... women tend to be more affectively oriented, whereas men tend to be more instrumentally

oriented” (p. 331). Sims and colleagues (1998) also found support for Tannen’s claims that boys prefer to play more in large, loosely formed groups, whereas girls prefer to interact in closer, more intimate dyads. Other researchers (Kirtley & Weaver, 1999) found no evidence to support claims of gender differences in communication.

Regardless of how little researchers may agree upon about gender and the existence of gender differences in communication, gender remains a factor we perceive from every individual we meet. Our perception tells us who that person might be in our lives (lover, friend, competition for a mate), whether or not we are in the same group, and what expectations we should have of that individual’s communication style.

Researchers (Kunkel & Burlison, 1999) found that through the process of social interaction, socially acceptable sex-role norms for behavior are communicated; these norms inform our expectations of others. Berg-Ziskind (1994) found that girls and boys are socialized differently in terms of their abilities to differentiate from and identify with an “*other*.” Kirtley and Weaver (1999) found that it is the *self-perception* of one’s gender role that has the greatest impact on self-reported communication styles.

Power Dynamics of Gender, Politics and the Danger of the Status Quo

Gender differences, whether real or merely perceived, socially or biologically created and maintained, often result in a power imbalance. In fact, Mulac, Bradac, and Gibbons (2001) argue, “...the most important [and destructive] consequence of gender-related language differences is a difference of social power or status, favoring men” (p. 133). Rather than pondering why gender differences exist, society would be well served to conceptualize differences in communication between the sexes in functional terms, i.e.

how they contribute to maintaining the current power imbalance (Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001).

An imbalance in power and status translates into inequality in access to resources and systems of social change, such as business, politics, and finance. This power imbalance is also played out in society's valuation of those activities typically viewed as feminine and masculine. According to Berg-Ziskind (1994), gender conflict originates in a patriarchal society that privileges the male over the female, despite claims of equality, in terms of spheres of activity, roles, reasoning and discourse, emotional styles and sexual needs. Reeder (1996) argues that the spheres in which the feminine is valued are accorded themselves less status than contexts in which the masculine is normalized and prioritized. Feminist economist Waring (1999), brings to public attention the fact that the reproductive labor and household work of women is not figured into the United Nations System of National Accounts. This economic ignoring of the contributions of millions of women devalues the work that women do in the home to such a degree that *no value* is placed on such work on a world-wide scale.

This global devaluation of "women's work" has devastating effects for the safety and health of the female half of the population. These effects are epitomized in policy and justice decisions. For example, *hate crimes* are defined as crimes that were motivated in whole or in part by a bias against the victim's perceived race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability (FBI, 2008). Prutzman (1994) points out that crimes that are primarily directed at women, such as rape, battering, sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence are usually not treated as hate crimes. The consequences of such

inequality have implications for policy, justice, sentencing and the overall view of women in society. The majority of violence against women is committed by men, the group that is not only more privileged, but also accorded more value than their victims (Katz & Earp, 2001). This fact does little to promote equity, justice or social change on the behalf of women.

Gendered Communication and Conflict

Regardless of the “why” behind gender differences in communication, there is enough research to support the idea that such differences exist. Kunkel and Burleson (1999) discuss current research: “In particular, women tend to produce feeling-centered and emotion-focused support messages – emotionally sophisticated strategies – whereas men tend to produce problem-focused messages – escape or diversion strategies.” Furthermore, in a recent study of undergraduate students at a Midwestern university (Nicoreta & Rancer, 1994), experiments were conducted to assess the generalizations of gender and sex-linked communication differences. Male subjects reported more aggressive communication tendencies. Both female and male participants stereotyped males as more argumentative and verbally aggressive than females. Mulac, Bradac, and Gibbons (2001) argue that, “exposure to different models affect boys’ and girls’ knowledge of language, and this difference in knowledge may affect both language behavior and *interpretations* of language behavior” (p. 146).

Such gender-based segregation of communication styles and the values assigned to them leave society in a tenuous situation. The ways in which one gender’s stereotypical communication style could work for members of the other gender are often

overlooked. Reeder (1996) argues, “One unfortunate result of this separation is that the ways in which a feminine [communication] style may be useful in organizations and the ways in which masculine communication [style] may be useful in relationships tend to be ignored” (p. 322). Jones (1999) agrees that communication strategies such as hedges and tag questions could be useful in situations and realms usually assigned to the masculine. “Hedges, for example, can be used to express sensitivity to other’s feelings (saving face) or minimize social distance by avoiding playing the expert”(p. 151). Jones further argues that tag questions invite others to join in the conversation and elicit information.

Why Continue to Study Gender?

The study of gender and the differences that exist between women’s and men’s experiences can be useful in the development of conflict resolution programs. Understanding power dynamics is a crucial step in determining ways to reach common agreement. Berg-Ziskind (1994) contends that many of the conflict resolution strategies developed by feminist theorists for use with gender issues can be useful in other sorts of conflicts. Learning to take the perspective of the “other” gender could increase empathy and in-group interactions.

The social construction of gender is an important consideration, not only in cross-gendered research, but also in cross-cultural research, given that gender roles and expectations vary across cultures. Jones (1999) emphasizes that researchers must pay attention to factors other than gender, such as ethnicity, class, race, status, power and context, and maintains that all these factors are interconnected (or *interdependent*), thus a

study of any one factor is not complete without giving significant consideration to the others.

Race

Like gender, race is a social construct and an organizing principal that has been used for so long its relevance and validity need to be questioned. Race is more than a box we check on forms. It is a construct whose fluidity is apparent by its constant change across time (Anderson & Fienberg, 2000). In 1787, the federal Constitution required that the census differentiate between slave and free persons and exclude Indians not taxed for purposes of Congressional apportionment (Anderson & Fienberg, 2000). Racial options on numerous forms and indeed, even on the US Census, have experienced marked change over the past 50 years (U.S. Census, 2006). Categories that once included “white, black and other” now have been expanded to include white, non-hispanic, black, non-hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Native American/Alaska Native, and other, non-specified (U.S. Census, 2006). Where once there was believed to be biological basis for racial categories, “biologists and anthropologists now agree that dividing humanity into different races is fabricated and fraudulent; racial categories are scientific fictions. Yet scientific fictions often become social facts with deadly consequences” (Lipsitz, 2000, p. 518). Although it is a fabricated construct, Dr. Cornel West observes that the degree to which race still matters in U.S. society is fundamentally depressing (2001). Race is another area around which invisible lines of group membership are drawn.

Race is perceived through visual cues, skin tone coming first in the line of input, followed by the possession or lack thereof of certain racially linked facial characteristics. Race is an important variable to consider when dealing with conflict, because even minute differences in skin tone offer opportunities to determine whether an individual is in-group or out-group, and therefore, the level of empathy, understanding or discrimination to direct toward said individual. According to race relations theory, as the representation of people of color within an organization or community increases, so does conflict within that organization or community (Milem, 2000). In the area of conflict resolution, the scientific fiction of race matters very much. Learning how to negotiate and resolve conflict across the imaginary yet palpable lines of race is of paramount importance and contingent upon recognizing racial discrimination and developing ways to address and reduce it.

Discrimination

The binding thread of discrimination will stitch together all of these variables: gender, race, culture, disability and power. Racial discrimination is called *racism* and is defined as prejudice plus power – the oppression or subjugation of a people based wholly upon their race, or the racist’s perception of their race, and takes place at the levels of individuals, groups and institutions (Hansman, Spencer, Grant & Jackson, 1999; Diller & Moule, 2005). Racism is nothing new; Malcolm X used to say that racism was like a Cadillac – they make a new model every year (Lipsitz, 2000). Hansman and colleagues (1999) explain that racism affects one’s worldview and one’s decision-making process, as well as conflict resolution abilities. They further describe how power, privilege and

oppression, “outgrowths of historically racist institutional practices, are crucial to understanding how racial prejudice and institutional racism ... prevail” (p. 20).

The focus of this thesis is on conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in middle and high schools in the United States. Students in these schools are in the midst of adolescence, a time of transition and often a time of frustration. Collins and Harvey (2001) argue that the experience of adolescence within Western culture is even more difficult for individuals from diverse racial, cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. The more one differs from the dominant culture, the more opportunities exist to err in interactions with the dominant culture members, members of one’s own group, or members of other groups. Often, school-based programs draw solely on the resources within the school building, ignoring strengths within the school community, such as student families.

Family and Racial Identity

Family is a crucial support in the lives of youth from racially diverse backgrounds and should be considered a resource for school-based interventions. Holleran and Waller (2003) found family to be extremely important in the lives of Chicano youth, especially with regards to inoculating these adolescents against the racial and cultural discrimination they will face. For Black and African American youth, family is an important hub of social information and training (Miller & MacIntosh, 1999). Wong, Eccles, and Sameroff, (2003) also found that parents and families are the site of central teachings of racial identification for youth. Racial identity serves as a protective factor, one that insulates adolescents from racial discrimination ((D’Imperio, Dubow, & Ippolito, 2000;

Moneta, Schneider, & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). Miller and MacIntosh (1999) identify the importance of racial socialization – the parental practice of raising socially and emotionally healthy children in a dominant culture that often equates blackness with negative images and ideas. The process of racial socialization helps Black and African American youth develop positive racial identities by emphasizing achievement and directly discussing issues of racism (Wong, et al, 2003; Li, Stanton, Pack, Harris, Cottrell, & Burns 2002).

Attempts to do “color-blind” mediation are doomed to fail when working with members of groups for whom racial identity is vital to their survival. Understanding and honoring these racial identities is of utmost importance to the success of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs. Involving members of racial minorities in peer mediation and conflict resolution programs as facilitators and consultants can help build collective self-esteem. Miller and MacIntosh (1999) found positive correlations between high collective self-esteem among African American and Black adolescents and their involvement in school activities that strengthen a sense of collective membership. Involvement in community building activities is related to increased collective self-esteem.

Race remains only one of several variables that influence the success of communication and conflict resolution. Race and culture are not interchangeable, they are separate constructs, but are often intertwined in such a way that one may identify their race as their culture and vice versa. Culture, which can include race, is the next interdependent variable.

Culture

While race and culture can be interlinked, culture is a separate construct from race. Culture is comprised of the customs, institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or group (Oxford, 2002). This includes a given society's norms, expectations and stereotypes. Culture is one of the most important considerations when discussing conflict, it is also often less visible than gender or race. As with gender, culture interacts with communication and conflict, as well as the other five interdependent variables. In spite of the cultural diversity of the population of the United States, the mediation and conflict resolution movements have fallen painfully short of incorporating cultural awareness and cultural competence into the larger part of their practices. Townley (1994) offers one example in the fact that mediator training teaches that eye contact is indicative of attention and respect. This teaching is in direct conflict with many cultures in which direct eye contact is viewed as disrespectful at best. Townley (1994) further critiques mediation by noting that the very practice and process of traditional mediation often disregards values and ideals of non-dominant groups, such as African American, Native American, Latino, and Asian cultures.

Culture and Gender Role Construction

Culture helps create and structure gender roles. Children around the world learn about the roles expected of them as members of their gender within their culture (Sims, et al, 1998). Although gender roles differ across cultures, the methods of socialization remain very much the same. Messages about gender role expectations come not only from the models to which young children are exposed, but also from a given culture's

reactions to and recognition of various models around the child. Kunkel and Burleson (1999) explain that some theories view sex differences as resulting from culturally based differences in socialization practices. Kirtley and Weaver (1999) describe gender roles as being socialized and unique variations in family structures that are often associated with different cultural groups which can result in different patterns of gender role stereotypes. Culture further influences the settings in which interactions between the sexes occur, likely impacting the conflict behaviors of those who live within such a culture (Hojjat, 2000).

Culture's Effect on Perceptions

A given culture's expectations and norms structure the perceptions of its members. Consequently, one's ability to solve problems across cultures is affected by one's values and worldview. Berg-Ziskind (1994) declares that social phenomena, like values and morals do not exist apart from our knowledge of them, but "... rather they are dependent on our knowledge of their attributes and requirements and on our acting appropriately in light of that knowledge. They live in and through our consciousness" (p. 338). We become conscious through our cultural socialization. Pockets of more and less extreme ways of thinking exist within and between cultures.

Perceptions affect not only interactions, but also our expectations of interactions. Nicoreta and Rancer (1994) explain that when we perceive an "other" as argumentative or verbally aggressive, we will attribute other positive and negative traits accordingly. What we see in others, how we view the world and its people, and the ways in which we interact with one another are determined, in large part, by our expectations.

Culture structures and changes one's perceptions on another level. The interaction between cultures, and how that interaction came about often determines the general climate of such interactions. Hansman, et al (1999) explain that minorities who immigrated to the U.S. expecting greater economic opportunities and political freedom experience better outcomes than those minorities who were brought here involuntarily, or those who were here prior to colonization. One's perception of their own place within the cultural hierarchy can impact their experience of the situation.

Cross-cultural Considerations

Cross-cultural communication is intrinsically challenging and offers many opportunities for misunderstanding and conflict. Mediating effectively across cultures requires careful consideration. Townley (1994) states that mediators can unintentionally promote prejudice and/or stereotyping because they unknowingly act on their own biases. Without adequate cross-cultural training, the neutrality of the mediator can be acutely compromised. Carter (2002) reports in a recent review of the current research that in school-based cross-cultural conflict resolution "...cultural differences in styles and goals of dispute resolution, as well as differential feelings of power, can affect the process and outcomes... and can influence student's acceptance of unjust mediation agreements" (p. 52) Carter further describes other areas of mediation that are potentially problematic, including negotiation, and that using assertiveness and open communication for the pursuit of one's own interests may not be a comfortable tactic for people from different cultures.

Sandole and van der Merwe (1993) recommend that we train individuals to conduct a “cultural analysis,” not only of the cultures outside of their own, but also of their own culture. This idea can be expanded to include the viewpoints of individuals from the same culture, but with different norms. Kirtley and Weaver (1999) warn us to recognize that we use different criteria to form perceptions of ourselves than we do to form perceptions of others.

We bring our own perceptions and definitions of people and culture and resultant expectations to every interaction. This is often problematic at best, and potentially catastrophic in larger-scale political interactions. Deutsch (1993) cautions that we must avoid ethnocentrism by understanding and accepting cultural difference as a reality. Moreover, Townley (1994) recommends that individuals trained in mediation skills should also possess cross-cultural literacy, including a clear understanding of one’s own values and beliefs and openness to learning about the knowledge and experiences of other people. Without such an understanding, appropriate and effective mediation becomes harder and harder to achieve.

Language

One of the many aspects of culture is that of language. There are important implications for mediation with regards to language. The power dynamics implied by whose language is used in cross-cultural mediation in which the parties speak different languages are varied and represent areas that are potentially problematic. Language is not only a part of culture, but it sets the tone of an interaction as well, by implying certain values. For example, in many languages other than English, most words, especially

nouns, have gender. There are subtle implications conveyed through the gender of words about what is valued by a given culture. Even in English, although many words do not necessarily have gender, there are culturally based sexist messages sent by such language conventions as the “generic he.” In a study of the “generic he in conversation” Stinger (2000) found that “the use of the pronoun he in circumstances of sex-indefinite reference unduly emphasizes men over women, thereby both reconstituting and signifying males’ micro political hegemony” (p. 67). Individual adverse reactions to the sexist nature of the English language vary, usually increasing with age. In fact, Parks and Robertson (2000) found that participants 23 years old and above had more favorable responses to nonsexist language than did younger participants.

Language not only has implications about how a society or culture views gender, but also how it views class, age and other cultures. There are intra- and inter-cultural political implications of language, how and when certain languages are used, which languages are spoken and by whom. If the language and communication practices of one group are used in conflict resolution instead of those of another group, both parties to the conflict, then language is creating a power imbalance. Language, methods of communicating, as well as meeting places and information formats can also create power imbalances with regards to disability.

Disability

Disability, like race, is a social construct that has some roots in lived human experience. Race and disability are alike in many ways. Smith (2004) argues that understanding whiteness theory is essential to the understanding of disability as a social

construct. Smith further argues that whiteness is the default setting for much of our social existence. Unless otherwise specified, whiteness is assumed, as is able-bodied-ness. Unless a disability is specified, the individual(s) being discussed are assumed to be able-bodied and white (and frequently male). In addition, Smith notes that by positioning whiteness as the default setting, we are exempt from having to look at how whiteness is itself constructed. He emphasizes that if we thoroughly explore whiteness as a social construct, we can begin to see race and disability as categories created by discrimination and social expectations of “normal.” He concludes that by looking critically at whiteness and “normal theory” we can begin to understand how invisible ideologies drive our social constructs and define our experience. Therefore, if we want to understand the interdependent variables of difference along which invisible group membership lines are forged, we must understand how “normalcy” is defined and/or assumed within a given context.

Discrimination: The Common Thread

As with gender, race and culture, disability is a construct around which discrimination readily develops. Historically, the use of a rehabilitation model of disability, rather than an elimination model is a fairly new concept (Wallin, 1924). The Eugenics movement sought to systematically stamp out disability, breeding the strong and healthy while leaving those who are different from mainstream society’s perception of “normal” out of many of life’s most integral processes: education, reproduction (via forced or coerced sterilizations) and participation in the market economy (Taylor & Searl, 1987). The eugenics idea of survival of the “fittest” persists more subtly today. Indeed, as

is evidenced by prenatal screening tests for “birth defects” such as spina bifida, Down syndrome and cystic fibrosis (Shakespeare, 1998), and the resulting medically sanctioned selective abortions (Hershey, 1984), individuals with disabilities are afforded lower status and rights to exist than are able-bodied individuals.

Unequal Access

Although much legislation has been passed regarding equal access for individuals with disabilities (e.g. Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA], Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act [IDEA]) (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), equal access to buildings, services, education, justice and life in general has not yet been achieved (Taylor & Searl, 1987; Johnson, 2003). Individuals with disabilities are assumed to be different from non-disabled persons. Disabilities are not always visible, but many are. Moreover, the term “disability” implies a lack of or dysfunction in some area of life. Individuals with disabilities are at a clear disadvantage on the hierarchy of what is valued by society.

When looking at conflict resolution and peer mediation program implementation and development, accessibility for individuals with disabilities is a key concept on which to attend. We must focus not only on physical access to buildings and rooms where such mediation and resolution services occur, but also on access to materials in alternate formats, on access to support, advocates and to the process itself. Conflict resolution is about leveling the playing field and decreasing power imbalance.

I proposed a model of conflict as a continuum in Chapter I in which empathy and in-group interactions occur at one end and discrimination and out-group interactions

occur at the other end. Disability or perceived disability can create an out-group interaction, thereby decreasing empathy, increasing the likelihood of discrimination and of violence. When one is further marginalized by other group membership differences, such as gender (Asch, Rousso & Jeffries, 2001), poverty (Beresford, 1996), race (Kirkpatrick, 1994) or culture (Harry, Grenot-Scheyer, Smith-Lewis, Park, Zin, & Schwartz, 1995), the out-group possibilities seem limitless. The over-arching issue at work with all of these interdependent variables of difference is that of power imbalance. Power, a common thread throughout this chapter, is a final variable that must be addressed, but cannot be discussed appropriately without the groundwork laid by the previous sections.

Power

Power, the fifth interdependent variable, interweaves itself through all the other variables. Power is at the heart of inequality related to gender, race, culture, and disability (Smith, 2004). Conflicts are exacerbated by power differentials. Discrimination based upon gender, race, culture, disability and class are all allowed due to power imbalance. Power is a salient factor in communication and affects various aspects such as who communicates, what is acceptable to say, and how conflicts are resolved.

Power differences not only contribute to conflict, but also to the inequity in access to resources for conflict resolution (hooks, 2000). Many of the critiques of mediation steeped in power imbalance. Who determines what methods of mediation and conflict resolution will be used? The dominant group, whose interests and customs may not reflect those of one or more of the disputing parties, determines the acceptable methods

of and processes for conflict resolution. This is equally so within the justice system as it is within the educational system.

Power also plays a role in social interaction, especially in schools. Members of a given in-group know when a competing group is higher in social power (Mulac, Bradac, & Gibbons, 2001). This divergence of access to social power and thus, to social influence is problematic and creates many opportunities for conflict. For school-aged children and youth, financial and political power may not play out to be as important as social power. Popularity is the ultimate power in the school environment (Simmons, 2002), and, although difficult to acquire, it is even more difficult to maintain. Power is a fundamental aspect of discrimination; those with the power to withhold funding, support, justice and access can discriminate – those without such power cannot (hooks, 2000).

Discrimination plays a vital role in many conflicts and acts of violence (Prutzman, 1994). Existing in a culture rife with stereotypes, conflict resolution efforts must function in an environment in which “-isms” abound. Racism, classism, ageism, and sexism are but a few among many. Racism is the oppression or subjugation of a people based wholly on their race, or the racists *perception* of their race and as a phenomena that may take place at the levels of individuals, groups and institutions (Hansman, et al, 1999), and includes two vital components – prejudice and power (Diller & Moule, 2005).

Power is essential in all of the –isms. Classism includes bias based upon money, clothing, appearance, group memberships and education (Prutzman & Johnson, 1997). Ageism refers to the practice of discriminating against an individual or group due to their age, or *perceived* age. Sexism, of course, refers to the discrimination or objectification of

an individual or group based upon their sex, or *perceived* sex. All cultures have norms, expectations and stereotypes, therefore, all cultures have “-isms,” though the specific nature and beliefs around a given culture’s norms and prejudices vary. It is crucial to note, here, that *perception* of one’s group membership is more important than one’s actual group membership when dealing with conflict and violence. Hate crimes are often committed against individuals based upon the group membership the perpetrators perceive of the victim, which may or may not align with the victim’s reality.

Smith’s (2004) earlier comparisons between race and disability lead us back to what it’s all about – **power**. Teachers, doctors and policy makers have incredible power over the lives of children, especially those with disabilities, or from marginalized backgrounds (Hentoff, 1985; Beresford, 1996). Parents listen to teachers and doctors and make decisions based largely on suggestions of these professionals (Hentoff, 1985). Parents who exist on the margins, whether by disability, race, socioeconomic status (SES), religion, sexual orientation, education level, culture, etc., are much more at-risk of being bullied by these systems and the people that work within them. In her article “Triple Jeopardy” (1994), Kirkpatrick investigates the intersections of disability, race and poverty in America. The more ways in which one is marginalized, the more likely one is to fall prey to imbalanced power and resources, and to be coerced into making decisions about themselves and their children by education and medical professionals with biased professional and research agendas.

Bullying

One way power imbalances play out between students in schools is through bullying. Bullying, which is perhaps more pervasive than other types of violence in our schools, occasionally takes the form of physical violence, but is equally damaging when it exists in a purely psychosocial realm (Leary, et al, 2003). Also referred to as psychological violence, bullying can occur in the form of verbal abuse, teasing, taunting, harassing, making obscene gestures or facial expressions, being intentionally excluded from participation and other nonphysical acts (Walker, Irvin, & Sprague, 1997; Peterson & Skiba, 2000; Simmons, 2002). The victims of bullying are not easy to identify, because the scars from this type of violence are often internal (Lincoln, 2001; Peterson & Skiba, 2000). Violence and conflict of this sort typically occur in places such as hallways and playgrounds, with little adult supervision (Peterson & Skiba, 2000).

Possibly because women are socialized to not be as physically violent as men, girls often become experts in psychological violence. In fact, throughout school, many girls utilize such tactics to gain popularity, “resolve” disputes, and provide consequences for their friends not obeying their commands (Simmons, 2002).

Conflict resolution programs could decrease these phenomena by involving teachers and school administrators more in the lives of students, increasing empathy and the understanding of difference, and providing students with alternate tactics to deal with conflict and misunderstanding. The issue of power imbalance that is almost always present in bullying situations must be addressed in order for true conflict resolution to occur.

Education

Sir Francis Bacon said “Knowledge is Power.” It follows, then, that those who control educational content, and thus determine what knowledge is offered and valued, also, to a large extent, control power (Harding, 1991). Because this discussion focuses on conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in schools, a discussion of education and how the five interdependent variables play out together or separately within current educational systems is in order.

Critiquing Education

Critics of the current educational system point to issues of curricula, structure and authoritative hierarchy. McHenry claims, “Schools, particularly high schools, traditionally see their mission as curriculum driven and content based” (2000, p. 225). Such a limited view of their missions leaves schools lacking an understanding of how important a roll they play in life-skills development and interaction training. The American educational system is an institution of both learning and socialization. Whether intended as part of the curriculum or not, children learn about how to treat others, what to value in themselves and how to interact with the world around them (Thorne, 2004; Bettie, 2003). Students often spend the majority of their waking hours in the school setting; how then, can schools not be one of the most influential vehicles of socialization in their lives?

Critiques of Curriculum and Content

Hansman and colleagues (1999) explain that educational institutions not only represent a microcosm of society, but also actively perpetuate prevailing hegemonic

attitudes of society through socialization. Returning to the issue of power, the dominant group determines what will be taught, which often limits students' exposure to history and traditions of non-dominant groups. Hansman and colleagues further contend "despite claims to the contrary, the barriers to understanding diverse cultural groups are still existent in institutional cultures where the subtleties to our racist past persist" (1999, p. 18). Townley (1994) argues that differences of gender, race, culture and class are neither acknowledged nor addressed in schools, causing students to experience school as monocultural. The inability or unwillingness to educate thoroughly about issues of difference leaves many students caught within an institutional framework that neither reflects nor acknowledges their realities. Students from marginalized groups are forced by educational systems to exist in the face of oppression from the very institutions that are supposed to liberate them and empower them with knowledge.

Clearly, a change in educational design and practices is necessary. In order to change the content and format of education, we must begin by educating about the faults of the current system and the dangers of perpetuating stereotypes within that system. We must actively address difference. Hansman and colleagues (1999) recommend that we shift focus to understanding that many of our current systems and processes were developed when the intention was to maintain an overt racist structure. Only by understanding our own stake in the status quo can we begin to deconstruct these practices.

By not acknowledging or addressing difference, education avoids the need to find solutions to problems it refuses to recognize. Education has tended, historically, to ignore

difference and avoid identifying conflict and inequity in the interest of maintaining harmony (Forcey & Rainforth, 1998). This tactic has proven ineffective in the long run, as ignoring differences widens the gulf between individuals, thus increasing conflict and decreasing understanding and empathy. Moreover, failing to acknowledge inequity perpetuates social injustice in the form of decreased access and agency for under-represented and marginalized groups. The educational system ignores the power of those who possess hegemonic qualities of the dominant culture. Curricular materials are biased by the dominant culture's values. Not only is history told from the view of the victor, but what contributions are valued and normalized in the fields of science, arts, and mathematics also speak to the hegemony of race in the dominant culture.

Critiquing Educational Structure: the Authority Hierarchy

Another critique of modern education is the structure in which learning takes place. The system is set up to create and reward certain learning and personality styles. We are taught to receive information as if being fed, rather than to search it out and embrace it. We are trained to not question authority or the information imparted to us. Knupfer (1995) argues that the format of education, the actual lessons themselves, do little to impart useful knowledge, in fact, she describes the structure used by many schools today as “replete with rote learning, an authoritarian teaching style, and decontextualized lesson plans...” (p. 227). In today's increasingly diverse society, the lessons that have filled textbooks for decades are not the most useful to the society of tomorrow. When discussing some of the conversations she had with students at an urban inner-city school after a recent lesson in literature and written correspondence, Knupfer

(1995) narrates, "... most students' families, and even some of the students, had guns. Almost all of the third and sixth graders had witnessed a shooting, some of or by their own relatives" (p. 235). Further highlighting the inappropriate nature of many lessons, she continues, "Some had family members in prison; one sixth grader's mother and father were both in prison. Evidently, the lives of these children were not grounded in Peter the Great nor in friendly letters" (p. 336). Her commentary highlights the need for change in educational structure. This is not to say that history or the ability to write friendly letters are unimportant skills and knowledge, but both can be re-structured to be more inclusive of difference and to be pertinent to the real-life situations the students face outside of the school building.

Hansman and colleagues (1999) suggest that education is critical in situating student self-concepts as privileged or oppressed. They further conclude, "if institutions ignore their constituents, which consists of their students and the larger society that the institution serves, they reproduce the status quo, thus further marginalizing minorities" (p. 21). By maintaining our current curriculum, we are perpetuating an educational system that privileges and emphasizes the achievements of white males. Student populations are not comprised primarily of white males – indeed, the inverse is often the case. Institutions who serve student populations made almost entirely of racial minorities often still do so in ways that reinforce the current power imbalance in favor of white males. Education is flawed at multiple levels. The institutional structure itself is bogged down in bureaucracy developed by the dominant culture, which makes social change something that must be approved through a committee. Curricular materials are biased in

favor of the white hegemonic masculine society and values. Power structures position men more often in administrative positions and women more often in direct teaching positions, thereby devaluing women's contributions by way of the power and weight given to their participation. Even behavioral expectations for classrooms and other areas within educational settings are based upon white, mainstream, hegemonic values. Individualistic focus is fundamental in educational situations, a fact that completely disregards the collectivistic community focus of almost every other culture. Students absorb what is happening in school as well as what is not. They know what is valued and internalized the institutional racism, classism, sexism and ethnocentrism they encounter every day (Bettie, 2003; Ziegler, Taylor & Scott, 1996).

Education and the Perpetuation of Gender Stereotypes

Education often reinforces gender stereotypes and expectations. From the ways in which boys and girls are treated, to the gender of the authors of textbooks and the stars of historical lessons, to the gender dynamics between the teachers, aids and administration, educational systems send numerous messages about gender roles and expectations. Similarities are an important part of diversity awareness training. Commonalities represent building blocks upon which understanding and empathy can be created

Issues of Physical, Social and Emotional Safety in Educational Settings

Peterson and Skiba (2000) define school climate as "the feelings that students and staff have about the school environment over a period of time." Many discussions of conflict resolution education focus on its function as a violence prevention tactic. While this is clearly a needed intervention, many of the tactics used as strictly violence

prevention may have negative effects on school climate. Peterson and Skiba further point out that un-addressed conflict and violence may have devastating affects on the school's unity and sense of community through the increased need for security measures such as "... video cameras, locker searches, and metal detectors, which are clearly intended to reduce school crime and violence..." Conflict resolution programs need to ensure that they improve school climate, while increasing safety.

CHAPTER III

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY: CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEER MEDIATION PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS TODAY

Introduction

In 1994, The United States Department of Education passed the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) that allocates financial assistance to more than 40 million students in 975 of the school districts in the country (Modzeleski, 1998). One important facet of the SDFSCA is the flexibility allowed by the act; it enables state and local education agencies to use their funds for programs designed specifically to prevent drug and alcohol abuse and school violence. In addition to the allocation of funds intended to combat violence and resolve conflict, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education developed a manual that provided local educational and community groups with assistance in selecting and implementing conflict resolution programs (Modzeleski, 1996).

Since 1994, the SDFSCA has been reauthorized, with increased emphasis on program efficacy (Modzeleski, 1998). There has been a boom in the development and

implementation of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in schools. These programs take a variety of forms. Many school-based programs utilize a 'cadre' approach, in which a small group of students are trained in peer mediation skills (Merina, 1995). Other programs train the entire class, grade or school population to handle conflict and take turns as mediators (Bickmore, 2002). In addition to these more traditional approaches to conflict resolution and mediation, there are two other programs that are addressing violence in school settings: Positive Behavior Support and Restorative Justice.

School-wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) systems address violence by explicitly teaching all students in the school appropriate behavioral expectations across school environments (OSEP, 2008). All staff and students are trained explicitly for all settings. SWPBS is based on the world Health Organization's triangle of prevention and intervention and is illustrated in Figure 2 (Appendix A). Everyone in the school receives the primary prevention training. Those who struggle with engaging in problem behavior receive interventions first at the secondary level of group interventions, and finally at the tertiary level of specialized individualized interventions (OSEP, 2008).

A final type of program being used in recent years to reduce drug and alcohol abuse and violence in schools is that of Restorative Justice (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Restorative justice represents a shift in paradigm from the "zero tolerance" policies so popular in the current educational landscape (Hopkins, 2002). The main ideas behind restorative justice are based on concepts of restoration rather than retribution. It places the emphasis on repairing harm done to relationships rather than on assigning blame and punishment (Hopkins, 2002). Whereas retribution focuses on punishment and the

offender “getting what’s coming to them” for breaking the rules, restorative justice focuses on the emotional and social disruption within the community and relationships that resulted from the offense (Karp & Breslin, 2001; Hopkins, 2002). Moreover, restorative justice involves processes that not only redress the impact of the offence on the victim, but also restore the situation, including damage to relationships and negative impacts on the offenders themselves (Drewery, 2004).

Evaluation is necessary for the further development and implementation of such programs. In considering the relative success or faults of these programs, researchers must first define program efficacy. For purposes of this paper, program outcomes will be conceptualized in terms of reduction of fighting, delinquent behavior, and drug abuse, and increases in self-esteem and problem-solving ability (Messing, 1993). Unfortunately, there is scant systematic research on the efficacy of such programs (Deutsch, 1993). In fact, the programs that have the most empirical support are those using SWPBS. There are, however, numerous anecdotes of the success of peer mediation and conflict resolution training in the form of benefits to student mediators and decreases in school violence. Taking a transformative view of conflict resolution education, Carter suggests that we measure “...how disputants are learning to build and maintain their communities through understanding and accommodation of differences within and beyond conflict mediation” (2002, p. 53). I discuss examples of these four main types of school-based programs and their efficacy below.

Programs and their Efficacy

Cadre-style Programs

The cadre approach to conflict resolution is popular, particularly because a select group of students are chosen to be trained in mediation and conflict resolution skills. This is significantly less expensive and time consuming than training the entire class or student population. Bickmore (2002) reports on such a conflict resolution education program, the Elementary School Initiative of the Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR), in the Cleveland Municipal School District in Ohio from 1997 to 1999. In this program a small group of students in each school are trained, outside of regular classes, to provide the mediation service. This is an excellent example of the 'cadre' approach. The mediation process of this program first establishes each participant's independent consent to participate and to keep the proceedings confidential. Second, each participant tells his/her own view of the problem. Third, the mediator assists the participants to communicate together to understand the solvable parts of their problem. Fourth, the mediator guides participants to generate and describe possible solutions, and to negotiate a resolution that they both/all can accept. Finally, the mediator assists the parties in affirmation and closure of both the process and the dispute.

Another cadre model of peer mediation is found in the DuVal High School in Lanham, Maryland. DuVal uses a team of peer mediators for the resolution of conflicts. Throughout the mediation session, the two peer mediators reinforce the rules: (a) listen carefully to what the other person is saying, (b) restate the problem in your own words, (c) don't interrupt, and (d) agree to solve the problem (Merina, 1995). Other cadre-style

approaches are being used in both elementary and secondary schools in Washington, D.C., Boston, Atlanta and San Francisco (Messing, 1993).

The use of the cadre approach to conflict resolution occurs even at the university level, where individuals may be more aware of issues of culture. The University of Massachusetts Ombuds Office has formed a Multicultural Mediation team that uses a proactive approach to addressing issues of both oppression and conflict resolution. Team members receive extensive training in both areas (Townley, 1994).

Bickmore (2002) found that in schools with sufficient numbers of peer mediators and open hours of availability, peer mediation programs are associated with decreased incidents of physical aggression. The students who were trained directly in mediation techniques experienced the greatest impact, but there was a notable benefit to the whole student population. "Peer mediation was associated with improvements in grade 3 – 5 students' understandings, feelings of efficacy, and willingness to nonviolently handle conflict" (Bickmore, 2002, p. 37). Moreover, school staff testified that they noted improvements in self-discipline, attitude toward school, and communication skills, particularly in students whom the staff had considered to be "troubled" students. These findings suggest that those with an increased need for intervention and a stronger propensity toward antisocial behavior can often experience the greatest benefit from conflict resolution and peer mediation interventions.

In another efficacy study, Zhang (1994) found that improved ability to deal constructively with conflict increased the social support that students experienced and decreased their victimization. Zhang further notes that the improvements in interpersonal

relationships decreased anxiety and increased internal locus of control, which lead to greater academic achievement. These findings indicate that conflict resolution training and peer mediation experiences improve the lives of all the students involved.

Consequently, these improvements in the interpersonal skills and relationships of the students were "...effective in promoting mental health, facilitating positive attitudes toward life, and enhancing self-esteem and internal locus of control." Echoing the findings of Bickmore (2002), the students in Zhang's study were older, more at-risk, and in schools experiencing more adverse conditions than in previous studies. Even with many factors present that increase tension and conflict, there were positive results – supporting the theory that the greater the need, the greater the benefit.

Whole-Class and Whole-School Programs

Other programs are being created through the partnering of different disciplines and branches of the community and educational systems. Cleveland Magnet School and the New York City SMART Program have both developed conflict curricula to address issues of drug problems, absenteeism, and violence (Messing, 1993). These curricula are administered to the entire student population.

A program widely used across the country, Children's Creative Response to Conflict (CCRC), is developed by an organization that has been working with elementary and middle-school teachers and students for more than 30 years. CCRC provides training on how to deescalate bias-related conflict and violence (Prutzman, 1994). This program focuses on cooperation, communication, affirmation, conflict resolution, problem solving, mediation, and bias awareness.

In Washington, D.C., the Department of Education and public schools worked together to create and implement a program that takes a comprehensive approach to drug and violence prevention. It includes a curriculum that is taught to the entire student population. The program was tried in six schools in the Marshall Heights section of Washington, D.C. and hopes to make evident the efficacy of a community-wide approach to violence prevention (Modzeleski, 1996).

Deerfield Run Elementary in Prince George's County, Maryland, uses a program called "Second Step." This program originated in the Seattle area and was conceived by the Committee for Children (Gustoff, 1999). The goal of the Second Step program is to teach elementary age students such skills as empathy, social skills impulse control and anger management (Larsen & Samdal, 2007). Second-Step lessons are taught by all classroom teachers and fully integrated into the regular curriculum. There is an optional workshop offered to parents. This fully integrated approach is enjoying excellent results; the rate of student suspension has dropped 65% over the past year (Gustoff, 1999). In Eugene, Oregon, Kennedy Middle School also implemented the Second Step program. Referrals to the principal's office dropped from 1,400 in 1996 to only 400 in 1998. The curriculum is integrated into regular classroom lessons and the entire school has been trained in the use of the program (Gustoff, 1999). Researchers in an urban area assessed 156 fifth- through eighth-grade African-American students to evaluate the impact of the Second Step Middle School curriculum on their social skills knowledge, aggressive behavior, pro-social behavior, and school bonding (McMahon & Washburn, 2003). They found that youth who received the Second Step lessons increased in their knowledge of

social skills and pro-social and empathy skills. Increases in empathy were also related to lower levels of aggression at post-test (McMahon & Washburn, 2003).

Another program being used in Cleveland is the ABLE program (Attribution, Behavior, Life skills Education), which is a school-based program that involves problem solving, planning, verbalization and reflective thinking. ABLE aims to improve students' self-concept and directly encourages students to use and practice techniques of problem solving and conflict resolution. The curriculum includes working through discussion-based problem solving activities (Hay, Bryne, & Butler, 2000).

Other schools are using programs referred to as *character education*. Character education is a broad term used to describe schools that use their general curriculum to promote the development of fundamental values in their students (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). One of the most widely researched programs is Character Counts!, a character education program designed for students aged 4-19 that helps students develop a consensus regarding a set of values and ethics that transcend race, politics, wealth, and gender (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). The program aims to instill the belief that no single value is inherently superior to any other values and that they (values) vary across differences.

In a recent article Peterson and Skiba (2000) reported that the improvements in students' lives and interactions were proportional to the number of conflict resolution lessons they had received. These findings provide a strong argument for integrating conflict resolution into the entire curriculum and training the entire school in the techniques, rather than using the cadre approach. In a comparison of violence-prevention

and conflict resolution curricula, it was found that although both are effective, conflict-resolution programs were more successful at violence reduction, especially the more serious types of violence (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). I theorize that the greater success at combating violence enjoyed by the conflict resolution curriculum is due to the enhanced self-concepts that are the direct result of improved communication skills and increased empathy.

Other antisocial behaviors that decreased as a result of conflict resolution training include fights, referrals to the office and school suspensions (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). “Finally, for the student mediators themselves, learning the mediation process has been shown to increase self-esteem and even to improve academic achievement” (p. 128). Two of the most significant prerequisites for effective programs are adult awareness and involvement; “school staff and parents must become aware of the extent of bully-victim problems in their own school... effective prevention also requires a commitment on the part of all adults to reduce or eliminate bullying” (Peterson & Skiba, p. 130). These last findings provide even greater support for school-wide training, and hint at why SWPBS is so successful – adult involvement of all of the adults in the school building.

School Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS)

In SWPBS, the “school rules” are made simple and easy to understand. Schools develop a set of 3-5 main ideas as a school motto of sorts. These mottos are intended to cover all behavioral expectations. Examples of such mottos include “Be Kind, Be Safe, Be Respectful” (Harris Elementary, Eugene, Oregon) or “Honesty, Respect responsibility, Perseverance, compassion, self-discipline, and giving” (Peterson & Skiba,

2000, p. 125). Another example is “Respect yourself. Respect others. Respect the environment.” (Willamette High School, Eugene, Oregon.) Once the school decides on the basic rules, these rules are taught to all staff and students. Students receive direct training in what each rule means and what appropriate behavior looks like in each different school environment (i.e. hallways, playground, bathrooms, cafeteria, classroom, etc.) (Sugai, Horner, Dunlap, Hieneman, Lewis, Nelson, et al. 2000). The Name “positive behavior supports” comes from one of the critical concepts of SWPBS, acknowledging positive behavior. Students are rewarded along a token economy (e.g. stickers, stars, some form of “school currency,” etc.) for behaving the way they should, given the school rules. Students might receive school currency for helping a friend at recess, assisting a teacher in cleaning up, talking in a quiet voice in the library, walking carefully in the hallway, or accompanying a fallen comrade to the office (Hieneman, Dunlap & Kincaid, 2005). School currency can then be exchanged for items in the school store and extra privileges (5 minutes more at recess, being first in line, lunch with the principal, etc.). SWPBS puts everyone on the same page, with the same expectations and is experiencing excellent results.

Jonesboro Middle School (JMS) has a population of 558 students, a 65% poverty rate and sits in the center of Clayton County, Georgia (OSEP, 2008). JMS decided to try SWPBS. The JMS team developed 3 simple rules, or behavioral expectations, for their school. Once they were developed the team took the expectations to the entire staff for approval. The staff settled on the following set of behavioral expectations:

1. Be Respectful of Self, Others, and Property.

2. Be Responsible and Prepared at all Times.
3. Be Ready to Follow Directions and Procedures.

These expectations were then taught explicitly to the entire student population. The results speak for themselves. The year prior to implementing SWPBS, Jonesboro Middle School had 1,252 office discipline referrals (ODR). The year after, they only had 674 ODR. The average referral takes approximately 15 minutes to handle. SWPBS enabled a time savings of 8,670 minutes. This is equivalent to 145 hours or almost twenty one school days. That is a month more of contact time that the staff had to spend instructing and interacting positively to their students (OSEP, 2008)!

SWPBS not only decreases school violence as evidenced by the decrease in office referrals, it also has a positive impact on students' academic performance. In an unnamed elementary school that had recently implemented SWPBS, an increased percentage of third graders met the state reading benchmarks compared to the performance of third graders in years prior to SWPBS implementation (Horner, Sugai, Smolkowski, Todd, Nakasato & Esperanza, under review). In Maryland, SWPBS implementation was also associated with improved academic outcomes for students (Bradshaw, Leaf & Debnam, 2007).

Restorative Justice Programs in Schools

In contrast to the three methods discussed above, restorative justice “requires a shift away from authoritarian controls because they effectively deny offenders and victims a meaningful role in the sanctioning process” (Karp & Breslin, 2001, p. 253). A recent study by Karp and Breslin (2001) reviews the use of restorative justice in schools

in the United States. Their study examines the use of restorative justice methods of dealing with alcohol and drug abuse and violence in several public school districts in Minnesota, in Denver metropolitan schools and in a group of publicly funded, privately run alternative schools in Pennsylvania.

In Minnesota, almost half of the school districts are using restorative practices to some degree, with four districts using them extensively. Within these districts, restorative justice is seeing results at both the elementary and secondary levels. At Seward Montessori Elementary School in Minneapolis, there was a 27% reduction in the number of suspensions and expulsions within the first year of the restorative justice project, as compared to the year prior. Lincoln Center Elementary school experienced a decrease by more than half in the number of referrals for violent behavior. Princeton High School experienced a dramatic and simultaneous reduction in the number of both detentions and out of school suspensions. South St. Paul High experienced the same type of drop, from 110 out-of-school suspension days in the first year to only 65 days the second year.

In Denver metropolitan schools, the Colorado School Mediation Project used restorative justice practices in its mediation program. In mediation conferences where restorative justice is used, the offender tells his or her side, the victim recounts his or her memory of the incident and then supporters of both sides have an opportunity to address how they have been affected (Karp & Breslin, 2001). The goal is for the offender to take responsibility for harm done and make amends to those who have been injured. One of the frustrations faced by mediators, especially with drug and alcohol offenses, is that the illegality of the act takes precedence over the restorative measures. Restorative justice

advocates suggest that crime should be re-defined as an injury to the victims and as having an impact on the offender and community, rather than as an affront to the power of the authorities and solely a breaking of rules.

Restorative justice practices have been implemented in six alternative schools in Pennsylvania. Students who attend these schools have all been labeled as “troubled” or “at-risk” and referred by their public high schools because they are failing to function in the public school settings. These students have experienced everything from physical and sexual abuse to incarceration and drug treatment prior to enrolling. When students are caught with illegal substances at one of these schools, they may have to face the juvenile justice system, but they will have the opportunity to make amends to the community. They must face their peers and explain the circumstances around the situation. Student caught in similar situations in other institutions do not have the opportunity to explain themselves to their peers and are not expected to address the harm they have done to the community and to their relationships.

In restorative justice, SWPBS and both whole-school and cadre programs, there is room for improvement. Researchers are constantly looking for ways to improve the quality of the service and curricula educators are able to offer to students.

Room for Improvements: Shortcomings of CR and PM Programs

Critiques of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in use today revolve around four major issues: follow up, acknowledging diversity, more support for student mediators and missed class time during training. I discuss these critiques from the literature in further detail below.

Carter (2002) argues that “very few schools include a follow up meeting for disputants after their participation in mediation, wherein they evaluate their mediated resolution and current feelings” (p. 54). Many of the researchers reviewed in this paper suggest the incorporation of a follow-up survey or meeting (Bickmore, 2002; Bunting & Reising, 1996; Deutsch, 1993; Larsen & Samdal, 2007). Not only will this allow participants to rate the process, it will also create space for re-negotiation, if necessary, and for the discussion of post-process feelings and ideas (Lincoln, 2001).

One of the most widely discussed criticisms underlies one of the major points of this paper, that of diversity and difference. As Carter (2002) states, although the process of conflict mediation has gained popularity and enjoys significant success, it could improve in both its processes and its outcomes, especially regarding the increasingly diverse student populations. Issues of power, privilege and difference are seldom addressed in CR curricula. Racial and cultural hegemony maintain a system where one style of communication and conflict resolution is valued over others (Zhou, 2003). As noted in Chapter I, many cultures do not practice the same level of assertiveness in regards to conflict (McAllister & Irvine, 2002). How to account for and accommodate both cultural differences and power discrepancies needs to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of these programs now and in the future. In Chapter IV, I outline specific recommendations from the literature as well as my own suggestions on how to incorporate diversity and difference into program development and implementation.

The third main criticism can be summed up by stating that in an effort to empower the student population, student mediators often do not receive appropriate adult assistance, which can lead to inappropriate resolution agreements. Carter (2002) provides an example of avoidance resolutions, plans for disputants to avoid one another, which are common outcomes of student-managed mediation without appropriate adult oversight. Carter (2002) further calls for an increase in assessment of student negotiation skills. Therefore, students need more adult support and supervision. The idea of scaffolding, which is defined essentially as providing only as much assistance as is necessary for the individual to gain competency, and removing assistance as the individual becomes increasingly proficient in certain skills, could be of great use in this scenario.

The fourth and final criticism refers mostly to cadre approach peer mediation and conflict resolution programs. Carter (2002) argues that many training models require students to miss instruction in their primary classes while participating in both the training and intervention activities. This criticism offers support for the idea of whole-school programs and indicates the utility of total integration of conflict resolution and peer mediation skills and training into the regular curriculum and school climate. The most successful programs do not require students to miss class time for training, because the training is embedded within the daily lessons. When the school personnel and administrators are trained in the same techniques, students benefit from the opportunity to see teachers lead by example and practice the techniques in their daily interactions with students, fellow faculty and staff, and community members. SWPBS is extremely

successful because it is in addition to, and at the same time, woven throughout the traditional curriculum.

CHAPTER IV

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

Conflict resolution has experienced many changes and exponential growth in recent decades. Although this field has adjusted somewhat to changing times, research suggests that more change is necessary. When developing and adapting current programs, it is crucial that practitioners and researchers consider the five variables discussed in Chapter II: gender, race, culture, disability and power. Education has a transformative potential, but education as an institution must also be transformed. Below, I identify suggestions from the research as they relate to these variables.

Curricular Mobility: Bridging the Gaps of Difference

The development of conflict resolution and peer mediation curricula must take into account the differences in lived realities between individuals, groups, classrooms, grades, schools, districts, cities, states, and regions. Program advisors and mediation teams should be allowed a certain leeway in the implementation of programs within their schools. This leeway will allow for the customization of such programs to the different needs of different schools (Bickmore, 2002). New and existing programs must be adapted

to enable such mobility -- developers should design programs with an understanding of how lessons and activities can be administered differently to students with different needs.

Carter (2002) argues that a critical feature of peer mediation program development is that the group of peer mediators must be representative of the diversity within the general school population. Programs whose mediation teams represent the student population accurately enjoy more success than programs whose students don't feel represented and understood by their mediation teams. As a result, it is crucial that teachers and administrators choose student mediators who represent the population of students. One way to ensure that diversity is reflected is to train *all* students in the mediation techniques and regularly rotate who will be mediating. As indicated in Chapter III, the students who benefit the most are the ones who receive the direct training. It stands to reason, then, that the way to make the greatest impact on the lives of students and to appropriately represent the diversity of the school is to train the entire student population.

Another way to ensure curricular mobility is to leave room in exercises and lessons for the incorporation of student's realities. Go to the students; meet them where they live, not where we want them to be. Include the popular culture that is relevant to the lives of the students. Often teachers are oblivious to the realities of the students' lives and object to the inclusion of vehicles such as rap music, popular culture, the modern media and issues of violence outside of the school into their curriculum. Knupfer (1995) cautions that we must take care not to 'police' popular culture and the subjectivities of

others by our own ‘good intentions’ within our classrooms. By allowing students to express themselves in their own rights, and by validating their realities, we can bridge the gap that often exists between teachers and students.

Many of the images and sentiments expressed in popular culture today are politically motivated, socially affected, and often controversial. Rather than avoiding such issues, due to their potential to increase conflict, teachers should embrace them as opportunities for students to learn to value and try to understand opposing viewpoints. We need to acknowledge the culture in which children actually exist. “Pop” culture can be a powerful vehicle for teaching conflict resolution. Knupfer (1995) further suggests that we link the worlds of students – hip-hop culture, street life, knowledge – to their development in literacy: reading, writing, and drama. By including the students’ descriptions of the concerns present in their lives, opportunities open up for discussions of the personal effects of the greater sociopolitical issues of oppression, power, privilege, racism and sexism.

Gender: The Struggle for Understanding

Gender differences have been researched and discussed for decades. There is a call from many researchers to re-think the ways in which we conduct gender research. Jones (1999) recommends that we adopt a social constructionist perspective of gender that would highlight the concept that gender is something we ‘do,’ not something we ‘are’ (West & Zimmerman, 1989). Jones additionally suggests that we would be well-served as both researchers, and as society if we stop thinking of the “gender difference” and start to look at it instead, *as the difference gender makes* (1999). This

recommendation creates space for the discussion of the power, oppression and privileges that surround the social constructs of gender. Sims and colleagues (1998) propose that in order to have a fair and equitable society, we need to “reconstruct gender to enable all human beings the right to use all social ways of being” (p. 15).

Society today is rife with discrepancies in power and privilege. Children learn these distinctions early in life. As discussed in the gender segment of Chapter II, Sims and colleagues (1998) found that children as young as 3-years-old are already exhibiting gender-segregated behavior. One response to this power imbalance is feminism. The word *feminism* itself conjures up images and interpretations that not reflect the true essence of the movement. Rather than teaching feminism as the “war between the sexes,” Meyers, Brashers, Winston and Grob (1997) propose that we teach feminism as a belief that opposes oppression of any kind of any people. Thus, feminism can be seen as a freedom movement meant to liberate everyone. This re-framing of the interpretation of feminism is fundamental to the creation of space for dialogue that expands techniques for dealing with gender differences to other differences as well.

Race: Educational Evolution

The educational system, its structure and its curriculum are in need of revision. Changes do not happen overnight. Townley (1994) challenges educators to teach students the knowledge and skills to transform school culture into that of common understanding and mutual respect and trust. Bell hooks (1994) declares that teaching must occur in “a manner that respects and cares for the *souls* of our students,” and that

such an approach is necessary for conditions to exist in which “learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (p. 17).

In order to create a learning environment that conceptualizes education as a method for imparting lifelong and relevant skills and knowledge, we must address the issue of institutional racism. Hansman and colleagues (1999) explain how to start this process; “one of the first steps, then, in dismantling institutional racism and moving toward anti-racism is to examine how power and privilege operate at either active or passive levels in maintaining an oppressive system” (p. 21). This process will not come easily and must occur through intentional, long-term and committed efforts. Hansman and colleagues further recommend that these efforts include simultaneous efforts to address racism at the personal, institutional and cultural levels.

Rethinking Conflict: Opportunities for Growth and Change

“Much past research on group and interpersonal communication has adopted a view of argument that largely ignores the values of cooperation and connection” (Meyers, et al, 1997, p. 38). By ignoring the potential of conflict to be positively transformative, we discount the positive and lasting effects of peaceful conflict resolution. Carter (2000) argues that the nature of the resolution of conflicts between students and groups often determines their future interactions. By teaching and demonstrating that conflict can be resolved in a non-violent manner, we expand not only the repertoires of students for handling conflict situations, but also their experience with constructive resolution and their awareness that such resolutions are possible. Carter (2002) develops this idea,

“Beyond reconciliation of their differences, many students need to experience positive interactions with one another to avoid future conflicts.”

The dynamics of racism must be addressed. “Educators need to allow for a process to begin – a process that promotes awareness and understanding of the fundamental nature of institutional racism” (Hansman, et al, 1999, p. 19). Racism is a difficult issue to address and it takes time and patience to change fundamental beliefs held not by individuals, but by entire societies. We must begin by acknowledging its existence. When we do not explicitly address the existence of institutional racism, we leave large groups of our students in positions of oppression with no sense of power. We invalidate their experiences of racism by not talking overtly about them. If change is to take place, we must look at the core of differences and the discrepancy in power created and maintained by our interpretations of such differences. We must call racial hegemony when we see it in action, we must address the inequity that is rampant in our culture and our schools (West, 2001).

Cultural Differences: Acknowledging and Appreciating Diversity

In 1994, the U.S. Census predicted that by the year 2000, the majority of those attending public school will be students of color (Townley, 1994). Therefore, racial and cultural diversity will be the norm, not the exception. Regrettably, the faculty and other school personnel in many cases neither reflect this diversity among their ranks, nor do they have appropriate training to deal with culturally based conflicts (Townley, 1994; Horm, 2003). In order to address this discrepancy in skills and understanding, an

increasing portion of the curriculum for conflict resolution and peer mediation programs focus on prejudice and bias (Townley, 1994).

Cultural Analysis: Looking Out and Looking In

Sandole and van der Merwe (1993) recommend a cultural analysis. This includes stepping out of ourselves and looking at other cultures in a non-judgmental way. When we seek to understand and normalize the exotic nature of other cultures, we can foster empathy toward members of that culture. In addition to conducting a cultural analysis of other cultures, Sandole and van der Merwe also suggest that we perform a cultural self-analysis, in which we step outside of our own cultures and identify aspects and traditions that may be strange to others. We try to exoticize the normal, to help us better understand what others may encounter from the outside looking in. Moreover, identifying aspects of our own cultures, especially if we belong to the mainstream dominant culture, makes visible what we often ignore. Our perceptions of normal, different, right and wrong are impacted by the culture, traditions and values we hold to be true and “normal.” These perceptions, based upon our own cultures, affect our perceptions of situations and individuals. A critical cultural self-analysis helps identify areas of one’s own culture that may seem exotic or frightening to others.

An introspective glance at ourselves and our ways of doing and being is not complete without looking critically at our conflict behaviors. An awareness of the actions we are likely to take in conflict situations is useful, as Deutsch (1993) explains that being aware of our own tendencies to respond in certain ways may enable us to modify these tendencies in situations in which other tactics would prove more appropriate. A thorough

cultural analysis can also help identify issues of disparity in power and access to resources. According to Carter (2002), social and political disparity continues when groups with varying levels of resources and agency fail to work together. By understanding and acknowledging different values and perspectives, we can more effectively identify not only disparities according to our cultural framework, but also those perceived by others with different cultural backgrounds.

Carter (2000) argues that, due to culturally based differences, there may be times when it is *inappropriate* to mediate a dispute. A thorough cultural analysis will be of assistance in identifying such times, and determining alternative methods for dealing with such conflicts. Understanding the “why” behind a cross-cultural conflict can further the success of resolving these conflicts. Carter (2002) argues that lasting peace will only occur in an environment where acceptance and understanding of, as well as adaptation to, cultural differences exist.

Cultural analysis also provides an opportunity to develop and improve the necessary skills for bias awareness. According to Prutzman and Johnson (1997), these skills include cultural fluency, flexibility, creativity, elaboration, tolerance for ambiguity and the ability to identify paradox. They further argue, “All of these skills can be worked on within the context of the elementary curriculum and provide a jumping-off place for work on bias issues” (p. 29). Clearly, the explicit instruction of conflict resolution skills, cultural awareness and tolerance for difference needs to begin early in life.

Disability

As with gender, race and culture, disability must be a variable that is considered in the development and implementation of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs (Miles, 2002). While there are teachers in the field of special education, there are very few professionals who understand how to incorporate special education services into culturally competent services for students who are from culturally or racially non-dominant backgrounds and also have disabilities (Miles, 2002; Smith, 2004).

Accessibility to mediation services, styles and information is of utmost importance when dealing with students with disabilities. Many students with disabilities are able to advocate for themselves, but others are not. In these cases, it is imperative to have advocates available to help students tell their side of the story, regardless of the role they may have played in the conflict. There is a tendency for educators to conceptualize students with disabilities as always being victimized, and, in fact, victimization of students with disabilities occurs at higher proportional rates than does victimization of their non-disabled peers in many districts (Nansel, et al, 2001). However, to assume that students with disabilities are always the victim in a conflict is to leave them disempowered (Smith, 2004).

Individuals with disabilities face discrimination, often on multiple fronts (Miles, 2002). It is imperative that we utilize episodes of discrimination as teachable moments, we call them what they are and address them directly. We must teach about acknowledging and honoring difference explicitly, because by not addressing it in a forthright manner, we enable covert discrimination to continue (Johnson, 2003). There

are obvious things we can do in terms of access – we can make materials available in large print, in readable files for computers, we can ensure the language of printed materials is at an appropriate grade level. The harder piece of addressing access is ensuring that students with disabilities feel welcomed by the process for dispute resolution or mediation, that they feel able to be heard by mediators and staff. These are much more difficult pieces to evaluate, but they are the most crucial (Smith, 2004).

Power

Parental Involvement: The Midas Touch?

There exists in education a long-standing hierarchy in which parents and community members are viewed as “auxiliary” to the educational process. This hierarchy exists in contrast to what researchers know – that parental involvement in education serves to strengthen the student’s understanding and retention of the material, increase the student’s success, decrease drop-outs and drug use and improve unity (D’Imperio, et al, 2000). The same positive effects can be seen with conflict resolution curricula; increased parent involvement results home environments that are more conducive to learning and improved communication between school and home (Peterson & Skiba, 2000). BY relinquishing some of the hierarchical power of education to the parents, teachers stand to gain much, and students gain even more. Accordingly, it is important to consider ways to increase parental involvement when developing CR and PM programs.

Achieving familial and community buy-in is made easier by increasing the power families and communities have over what is happening in their schools. By actively seeking and making opportunities for familial and community involvement, schools

effectively place power in the hands of the populations they serve. One aspect for educators to bear in mind is that parents will likely benefit from exposure to, and training in, the same conflict resolution techniques that these programs teach children. Obviously, compulsory parental education and training is not an option, but it is of increasing importance to make parental training and education available to interested parties. As Townley (1995) argues, it is crucial to provide adults in the lives of young people with the skills necessary to act as appropriate role models. Parental training and education may augment parental involvement.

Researchers have a role to play in increasing parental involvement. Efficacy studies that show positive results from parental involvement can increase the desire of parents to be involved. Results that indicate long-term positive effects on the family environment and the greater community in the form of decreased crime and vandalism and increased unity will intensify the interest of parents and community members alike. Such results must be disseminated in accessible formats, in the form of parent newsletters and community bulletins, rather than solely in the realm of published peer reviewed, self-congratulatory journals (Hansman, et al, 1999).

School - Community Partnerships

Communities stand to gain a lot from conflict resolution programs; not only will the students' performance and interactions in school improve, but the conflict resolution and communication skills that they gain in such programs will transfer over to interactions outside of school. Conversely, schools stand to gain a great deal by inviting open and frequent participation from communities in the creation, modification and

implementation of such programs. Johnson and Johnson (1994) found that students reported using learned negotiation and mediation strategies with siblings and peers outside of school. Conflict resolution skills will benefit not only the students who learn them, but everyone with whom the students interact throughout their life. Carter (2002) underscores the importance of the ability to resolve conflicts in a constructive and non-violent manner. Communities are more likely to embrace programs over which they feel a certain ownership and investment. Community empowerment begins with community involvement.

McHenry (2000) found that the conflict resolution programs in area schools created space for community dialogue about important disagreements. The end result was a community that benefited from the new ways of resolving conflict on a level much larger than that of individual students. If ever a “ripple effect” was found, conflict resolution definitely has it. Lincoln (2001) articulates this concept, and hope for the future; “The community need for conflict resolution education will be evidenced in the lasting effects and lifelong skills of problem-solving and peacemaking strategies developed and implemented by mediators and students as they benefit society as a whole” (p. 40).

Educational Transformation

Hansman and colleagues (1999) argue that education has the socialization potential to modify such constructs as racism, sexism, and other *-isms* that lead to oppression. The skills required to communicate peacefully and effectively can make a huge difference in the levels of violence and conflict in schools and in the larger

community as well. Nicoreta and Rancer (1994) suggest that individuals resort to verbally aggressive behavior during interpersonal conflict when they lack motivation and skill in arguing. It stands to reason that if we teach nonviolent arguing skills we decrease the likelihood of verbally aggressive behavior. Furthermore, changing perceptions will change both behaviors and expectations of the behaviors of others in interactions. Through explicit education in the skills needed to resolve conflict and engage in non-biased communication, we can increase understanding and empathy. If educators highlight similarities as well as differences, they can shape the perceptions of students and thus, change the expectations students have of themselves and of one another.

Preventing Violence: A Call for Early Intervention

The majority of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are geared towards older elementary through high school aged students. It is never too early to begin to work with children on developing empathy and decreasing bias. As we discussed in Chapter II, children as young as 3-years-old already internalize social norms and function within the framework of stereotypical role expectations. This fact has grave implications for our future if we don't educate and train children early. Prutzman (1994) identifies the need for early violence prevention. Indeed, Bickmore (2002) found that "...young children can indeed help build peaceful environments" (p. 37). Involving children directly with social and institutional change will instill within them a d a vested interest in their community. Even issues such as bias are more effectively dealt with when the interventions begin early in life. Bias awareness and reduction works more slowly with adults than a with young people (Prutzman & Johnson, 1997) Where early interventions

for conflict resolution and peer mediation concerned, there is both a demonstrated need, as well as a record of success.

School Wide Training: Is Everyone on the Same Page?

Often, teachers and their ability to deal effectively with conflict in the classroom can make all of the difference in how well a program works. There are indications that school-wide training plays an essential role in the success of a given program. In fact, Deutsch (1993) found that teachers can take up to four years to become comfortable and skilled in the use of conflict resolution and cooperative learning strategies. The benefits of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are not the students' alone, neither is the responsibility. "Everyone, from administrators to faculty members, has the potential of being actively involved in changing institutional culture" (Hansman, et al, 1999, p. 17) Undeniably, there is a need for the teachers, administrators and other school personnel to be trained sufficiently in order to maximize the payoff of these programs. A teacher at DuVal High school stated after school-wide training took place, "Now, teachers, administrators, and support staff are trained to watch for the signs and head a situation off before it gets too bad" (Merina, 1995, p. 10) Forcey and Rainworth (1998) express their shared conviction that the engagement of faculty in the practices they wanted students to adopt is of utmost importance. For students, seeing the techniques they are being taught actually practiced can not only set an example, but also assist them in determining how to teach these practices to others. McHenry (2000) found, through student interviews that the faculty's modeling of caring, respect listening and tolerance was fundamental to the students' unity and connection to one another and to their community. Townley (1995)

reports a consensus from researchers in conflict resolution and mediation fields, “for peer mediation to succeed, the whole school community – students, staff, and –parents – must understand the principles being taught” (p. 80). The programs experiencing the most positive results, SWPBS and restorative justice programs, both involve extensive staff training for the entire school and restorative justice depends heavily on community involvement. Empowering stakeholders is extremely important.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

MAKING EDUCATION RELEVANT: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Continuum of Conflict and Empathy

In Chapter I, I proposed a model of conflict (Figure 1, Appendix A) as occurring along a continuum. At one end, there is empathy, in-group identification and successful resolution of conflict, at the other end is discrimination, out-group identification and potential for violence as a result of conflict. I suggested, in Chapter II, that five primary variables of difference impact communication and conflict: gender, race, culture, disability and power. In Chapter III, I explored research which indicates that teaching conflict resolution and mediation skills to students increases their ability to feel empathy and decreases the likelihood of violence as a result of conflict. In Chapter IV, I explored suggestions from the research to improve the efficacy and appropriateness of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs. This exploration was framed around issues of gender, race, culture, disability, and power. In this final chapter, I will discuss specific curricular adjustments that can be used to increase empathy and decrease bias,

discrimination and violence. First, however, I want to discuss how the model of conflict's continuum and empathy is linked to adolescent self-concept and how important positive self-concept is to outcomes for all students.

The Fundamental Importance of Adolescent Self-Concept

Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs aren't just about behavior modification and violence reduction. Recent studies have linked improved conflict resolution skills to improved student self-concepts and academic performance (Hay, et al, 2000; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Zhang, 1994; Sugai, et al, 2000). Schools and communities have a lot to gain by improving the self-concepts of adolescents. In a recent study, evidence suggests that self-concept has an impact on the areas of: classroom behavior, cooperation, persistence, leadership, anxiety, expectations for future schooling and peer interactions (Hay, Bryne & Butler, 2000). In other words, when the student has a positive self-concept, her or his classroom behavior is constructive and she or he will experience positive educational and social gains. It is important to understand that the inverse is also true; adolescents with poor self-concepts are more likely to behave in a disruptive manner and not achieve positive social and academic gains (Horner, et al, under review).

Deutsch (1993) makes clear that valuing self and others, as well as respecting the differences between oneself and others is of paramount importance to the successful coexistence of students and citizens alike. Deutsch (1993) further states that core values of universal human dignity should be incorporated into all lessons, not just conflict resolution curricula. Moreover, students should (and do) learn, not only from their direct

instruction lessons, but also from the interactions they observe of how teachers and administrators treat students and each other. Therefore, teachers, staff members and administrators lead by example, whether or not it is intended.

Teaching students conflict resolution and peer mediation strategies empowers them to regulate their own behavior (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Clearly, there are long-term positive implications for the impact of these programs on students. It is important to remember that today's students are tomorrow's citizens. Improving their social and psychological functioning, in addition to their academic performance, will hopefully lead to a society of individuals who possess the skills necessary to create and maintain peaceful interactions.

Positive conflict resolution skills can lead to increased social networks. Along the continuum of conflict, the more empathy one has, the greater opportunity one has for in-group interactions: identifying with others as members of the same group (as defined by varying factors). The more students feel that they are in-group with others, the greater their opportunity to form social bonds and create social networks. Creating social networks serves not only to decrease risk-taking and antisocial behavior by increasing attachment and commitments, it also has lasting effects on an individual's overall well being (Zhang, 1994). Research indicates that individuals who feel part of social networks are less likely to be adversely affected by life stresses (Zhang, 1994). Furthermore, Zhang (1994) suggests that self-esteem is influenced by the opinions of others that are deemed important in an individual's life and concludes "... it would be reasonable to assume that

changing self-esteem is to some extent contingent upon the status a person possesses in his or her social network” (p. 114).

In a study of conflict resolution efficacy, Zhang (1994) found that improved conflict management and cooperation skills were positively linked to students’ relationships with others, which resulted in increased social support. These results support the idea that increasing one’s conflict resolution competence helped increase the social support and decrease the victimization experienced by the individual. This positive change in the experiences of the individual enhanced positive attitudes toward life and contributed to greater academic achievement. Conflict resolution skills not only improve students’ social outcomes, but impact their academic outcomes as well. The relationship described here is illustrated in Figure 4 (Appendix A).

Johnson and Johnson (1994) suggest that lifelong changes are possible as a result of improvements in the self-management of conflict behavior. Indeed, long-term positive effects have been noted in anecdotal evidence. Parents in a variety of different programs have reported the generalization of conflict resolution and mediation skills to disagreements at home and in the community, and the possibility for macro-level changes resulting from these programs is becoming a reality. Hay and colleagues (2000) describe the primary challenge for educators and counselors as determining effective methods for targeting instruction toward students who are vulnerable for various reasons, including being members of marginalized groups. Moreover, reaching students who are at-risk due to gender, race, culture, disability or lack of power is critical in the struggle to build understanding and empathy among students and citizens. It is equally important that

students who are members of the dominant culture develop empathy and understanding toward students they once perceived as being different and therefore out-group from themselves. Helping all students to develop empathy and compassion will improve both their self-concepts and their ability to succeed in school, in social interactions and in life. In order to create empathy across lines of difference, we need to address bias and generate opportunities for perspective-taking exercises.

Classroom Strategies to Build Empathy and Increase Bias Awareness

Classroom strategies to increase empathy and decrease bias fall into three categories: techniques the teacher can use when delivering instruction or information, re-writing exercises and role-play exercises. Each strategy can be applied with attention to gender, race, culture, disability, and power discrepancies. I describe each more fully below. Each of these classroom strategies could stand alone, be part of a conflict resolution or peer mediation curriculum, or be integrated into the larger curriculum. In addition, the classroom subject focus of many of these strategies links them coursework in literature, language arts, reading and social studies classes. Using these strategies to align conflict resolution curriculum with class work can make the whole experience more integrated and meaningful for teachers and students.

Techniques for Teachers

Teachers have incredible influence over their students. This influence can be positive or negative, intended or unintended, but their actions and inactions influence the students they teach. One of the most important things a teacher can do is be both thoughtful and purposeful in the ways they deliver instruction and information. One

excellent technique for teachers to use toward the beginning of the year will set the tone for all instruction to come – the “what is your culture” exercise (Povenmire-Kirk, 2007). In this exercise, the teacher asks all students in the class to take a few minutes to write down a paragraph or two that describes their culture. The teacher can offer prompts, such as: “What do you value? What traditions do you hold? Whom do you consider your ancestors?” After students have had a while to grapple with the situation, the teacher calls them back together to debrief. Instead of asking them to share what they wrote, the teacher asks them how the exercise *felt*. The teacher asks students which parts were easy and which parts were frustrating. They then have a discussion about how it would feel to have people trying to work with you, teach you, or be your friend with only that one paragraph about you to go on. This can be done at all different grade levels in age appropriate language, from kindergarten to adulthood.

There are two main points to the “What is your culture” exercise. The first is the idea of trying to be culturally competent (in younger grades, one would say ‘understand’) with limited information about other groups. Stereotypical information about members of marginalized groups is what has passed for diversity sensitivity training in the corporate world for decades. The “What is your culture” exercise puts everyone in the position of having someone only know about them what they could put into two paragraphs. The second point of this exercise is to increase awareness of one’s own culture. Many students from dominant culture backgrounds report never having thought about themselves as having a culture before this exercise. Those who come from marginalized groups may still only have an understanding of their own culture and never have thought

about how diverse each individual is from one another. This exercise sets the tone of the instruction for the entire time these students are working with this teacher and with one another. Understanding where one's own values and traditions, assumptions and ideas of right and wrong come from is paramount to understanding cross-cultural communication and conflict.

A second technique for teachers to use is to be purposeful about delivering information about different groups without exoticizing or "otherizing" the group. Some schools have international day or multicultural month, where the most extreme traditions, foods, music and clothing of non-dominant and often distant cultures are paraded around in celebration of diversity. Many times, as a parent, I have seen "traditional dance" performances by members of non-dominant groups with no discussion or acknowledgement of how or why one would perform these dances. This type of acknowledgement serves to further marginalize and exoticize the non-dominant cultures and groups. One way to avoid this type of display of difference is to investigate the traditions of many groups, including the dominant group. For example, the concepts of the Easter Bunny or the Tooth Fairy are dominant culture traditions in which many members participate, but of which few know the roots. Just as one might teach the history of why Dutch children put out their shoes at Christmas and others put out their socks, or stockings, a teacher can also guide students in learning about how and why the Tooth Fairy myth came about. By treating traditions assumed to be normal by the dominant culture as interesting and exotic learning points, teachers can help create understanding and reduce bias in their classrooms. Teachers should be careful to explore many different

types of myths and traditions in a respectful and curious way, while acknowledging the benefits of each.

Re-Writing Strategies

The ability to take the perspective of another person is crucial to both the development of empathy and the ability to peacefully resolve conflict. Another main category of strategies to increase empathy and decrease bias is that of re-writing or re-telling. The idea is that in many stories, including fairy tales, classic novels and historical accounts are often told from only one standpoint. History is written by the victors. Instead of simply reading the book, teachers can assign their students the task of re-telling the story from a different standpoint. Hansel and Gretel could be told from the standpoint of the witch, Goldilocks from the standpoint of Goldilocks herself, and so forth. These types of assignments offer opportunities to discuss the values implied by the standpoint of the story. Teachers can lead their students in discussions of the implied values of certain fairy tales. How would Little Red Riding Hood read if told by the wolf, or by Granny? The idea that all characters in a story have a perspective is an important one for empathy building.

This same technique can be used at the level of novels, like Huck Finn, Moby Dick, and anything by Dickens. What is the perspective of the whale? At a higher grade level, with a more complex analysis of symbolism, re-writing certain scenes from a different perspective can really change everything. How would the symbolism change in Huck Finn (Twain, 1885) if it were written from the escaped slave, Jim's, perspective? How would race change the implications of the river? If students each take one scene

from a novel they are reading and re-write it from a different character's perspective, they can share their work and see how the scenes and overall meanings can change. Teachers can more thoughtfully assign each student a different perspective or character, which will change the gender, race, culture, disability or power of the narrator. This exercise can be adapted to address various levels of difference and students can come together to discuss the changes in the story based upon the changes in perspective.

A third area where re-writing exercises can be used is in history, or social studies. I said earlier that history is written by the victors. History is different than fairy tales and novels because there is a degree of factual information apparent in the way things are. For example, the United States is not a collection of British colonies, slavery has been abolished, colonization has occurred. These are facts that are re-told "historically" through accounts written by those in power. Re-writing historical accounts from different standpoints provides an excellent way to shift the balance of power in a different direction. This type of exercise can really get students thinking and feeling about how things got to be the way things are and how the future can be different.

Role-Play Activities

The third and final classroom strategy I recommend here is that of role-play activities. These can take many forms. The easiest method is to find a conflict in some lesson one is already teaching; like the re-writing strategies above, one can use literature, reading, social studies or language arts subject matter for these lessons. After identifying a conflict between characters in the lessons of the day, the teacher can assign students to role-play the conflict either in small groups, or in front of the whole class. The class can

work together to discuss and describe ways that this could have gone differently and other things the characters could have done. All of the students benefit from seeing how differently the conflict could have played out if different choices had been made.

Sometimes conflict occurs between students in a very public way. Role-playing can be incredibly useful to help students come to an understanding of one another's perspective. It is crucial to note that physical confrontations should never be the subject of role-playing exercises in any way. Moreover, if students are going to role play a conflict, students should take on the role of the opposite party to the conflict and teachers must be proficient in managing such an exercise, lest it not become an opportunity to make fun of one another. The real-life balance of power between students involved in such a conflict must be taken into account prior to commencing a role-play activity.

One way to circumvent some of the potential downfalls of having adversarial students involved in conflict role-play said conflict is to use Forum Theater (Paterson, 1995). Forum Theater can provide the opportunity for conflict resolution training, empathy building and bias awareness and prevention all rolled up into one. There are several aspects of Forum Theater. First, there exist numerous physical activities designed to build camaraderie and trust between players. In a classroom environment, 3-6 short exercises usually loosen things up enough to get students ready for the next step. Forum Theater is an opportunity to act out situations of oppression or discrimination in a manner that can be enlightening and empowering for all involved. First, everyone writes down an incidence of oppression or discrimination or a conflict they have either witnessed, perpetrated, or experienced. This step is done anonymously. Younger students may need

preparatory discussion about oppression and discrimination, as well as examples that illustrate these concepts. It is surprising how well kids are able to carry this out, once they understand the concept. Second, all of these scenarios are put in a hat, box, or can. The facilitator pulls out scenarios, one by one, and students volunteer to act them out. Third, one of the cornerstones of Forum Theater is that the audience participates. Everyone has an “invisible remote control” and can stop the scene, offer suggestions to the actors, or swap positions with any player. This allows students to gain control over situations in which oppression had control. They can re-enact situations in which they wish they had done something differently, and players are given an opportunity to practice what they would do if a situation they have not yet encountered presents itself.

Regardless of the type of strategy used, the important idea is that we must address diversity, bias and conflict in our classrooms in a proactive way. The hallmarks of successful conflict resolution and peer mediation programs include the ability to directly address bias and diversity. These are also hallmarks of successful citizens.

The ability to work cooperatively with others is crucial to building and maintaining stable relationships, communities, careers and a peaceful world (Deutsch, 1993). It is imperative that we, as educators, parents and citizens work together to instill in children the values and skills necessary for the establishment and preservation of a peaceful society, free from violence and oppression. Deutsch (1993) expresses his hope that by the time they reach adulthood, students of today will have learned and cultivated the requisite knowledge, attitudes, and skills to cooperate with others in resolving

constructively the conflicts that will inevitably occur among and within groups, nations, families and communities.

It is important to remember that, just as conflict escalates, so do conflict resolution and positive diversity skills. The more we practice these skills, the better we become at dealing with bias and the more success we will enjoy when interacting with each other (Prutzman & Johnson, 1997). McHenry (2000) reminds us that schools are ideal places for moral development to take place. Through conflict resolution and peer mediation programs, including involvement and training of parents and community members, we can “embrace tension and conflict as an opportunity for moral growth. We must create educational institutions that reflect the best of humanity” (McHenry, 2000, p. 238).

In Summary: Essential Components for Successful Learning Environments

Lincoln (2001) states, “A cooperative learning environment improves the climate in schools and communities, while challenging young people to accept the fact that peaceful and interactive communities are a realistic goal in today’s society” (p. 39). The idea that we can achieve peace and decrease, if not eradicate, violence takes some thinking through before it becomes a realistic possibility. In order for this to occur, we must first create environments that include respect, trust, cohesiveness (empathy and in-group interactions) and opportunities for social growth through community problem solving (Lincoln, 2001). Berg-Ziskind (1994) emphasizes the importance of listening for effective communication to take place.

I echo Peterson and Skiba (2000) in their assertion that feelings of comfort and support enhance learning and teaching, as well as student behavior and attitudes. Affecting school climate to improve feelings of connectedness and unity is of paramount importance. Consequently, improving school climate is one of the most important factors to creating a successful learning environment.

Peterson and Skiba (2000) list three necessary components to incorporate in the development of conflict resolution programs. “These include (a) prevention, (b) identification and intervention for students at risk for having difficulty, and (c) effective responses once inappropriate behavior has occurred” (p. 128). Developing and implementing certain and appropriate consequences for unacceptable behavior are necessary for conflict resolution to be effective. Participants must know that there are responses to certain behaviors for which conflict resolution or peer mediation would be inappropriate. The creation and maintenance of a cooperative learning environment is crucial to successful transformation. Lincoln (2001) outlines four points that are necessary to the existence of a cooperative learning environment. First, it must be accepted that conflict is natural and normal, as well as inevitable. Second, it is essential that differences be acknowledged and appreciated. The contributions of all parties must be recognized and space should be created for such contributions to take place. Third, conflict should be viewed as a solution-building opportunity that can lead to positive social change. And fourth, it is vital that conflicting parties be encouraged to build upon one another’s strengths to find solutions. This creates a climate that nurtures the self-worth of all individuals and provides opportunities to meet each individual’s needs.

Lincoln (2001) describes some of the positive benefits of conflict resolution and peer mediation programs: improvements in social interactions, family dynamics, relationships, community- and school-related activities, learning environments, vocational training, and life-long experiences. With so much to gain and so little to lose, conflict resolution and peer mediation programs should be implemented in every school in every state. There are vast rewards for implementing such programs, and these rewards change the face of the nation and the norms and values of society. “Creating a climate of tolerance dissipates violence as future generations learn alternative methods for dealing with differences” (Lincoln, 2001, p. 39)

APPENDIX A

FIGURES

Figure 1: Conflict Continuum: Empathy versus Discrimination



Figure 2: Positive Behavior Support Triangle of Intervention

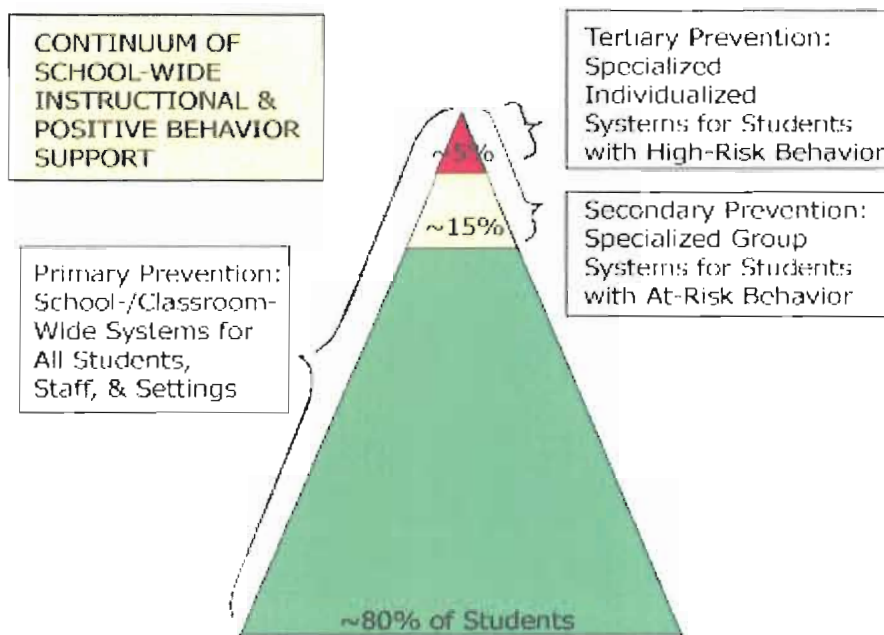


Figure 3: Four Elements of Positive Behavior Support

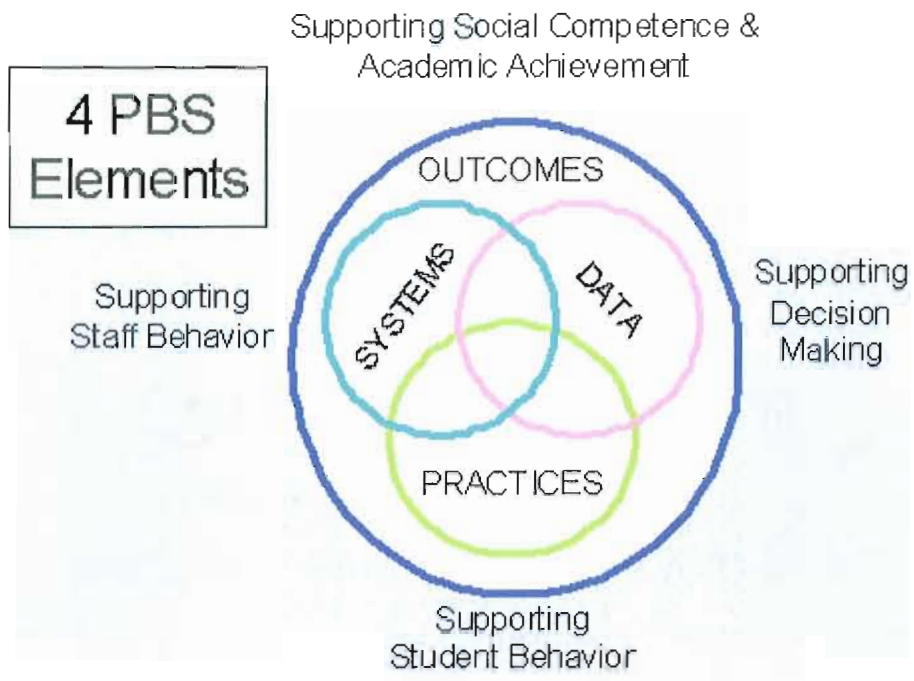
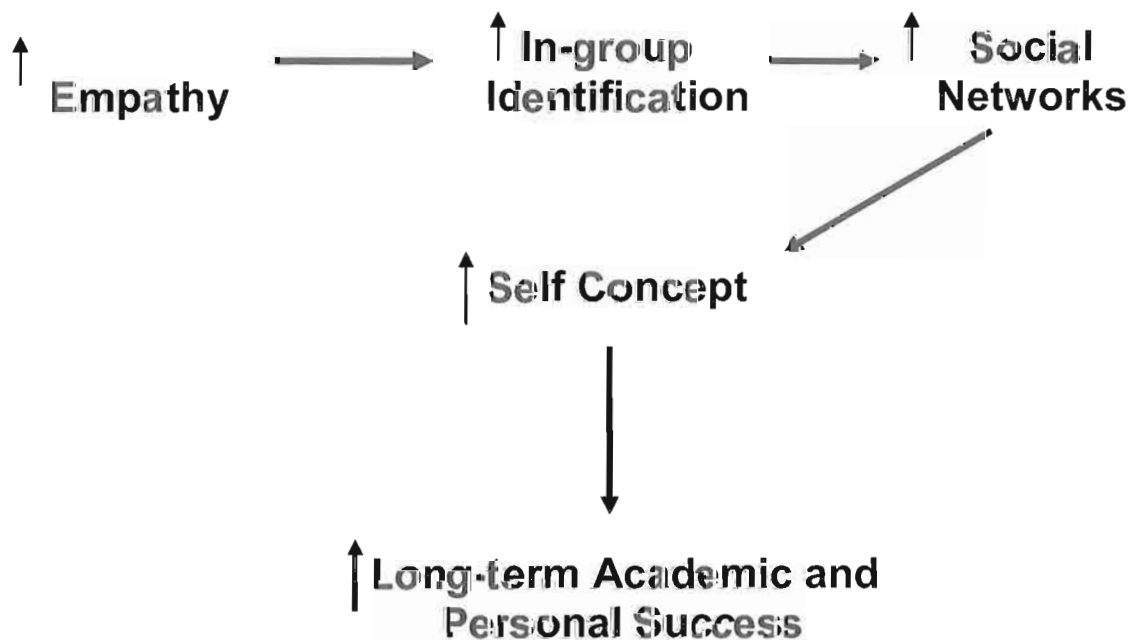


Figure 4: Empathy to Success in Life



APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Ageism: the practice of discriminating against an individual or group due to their age, or perceived age.

Alternative Dispute Resolution :ADR “refers to an alternative such as mediation, negotiation or arbitration to the traditional court process or adjudication...is intended to facilitate settlement of civil cases before going to trial, through encouraging voluntary agreements as a result of informal sessions with magistrates or judges.” (Messing, 1993)

Arbitration:“ ... voluntary or required submission of a dispute to a neutral third party who renders a decision after hearing arguments and evaluating the evidence. In binding arbitration, the parties agree to an assigned arbitrator and are legally bound by the decision.” (Messing, 1993)

Assertiveness: an individual’s tendency to be dominant, ascendant, and forceful in interpersonal contexts.

Bullying:“A student is being bullied or victimized when exposed, repeatedly over time, to intentional injury or discomfort inflicted by one or more other students. This may include using physical contact or verbal assault, making obscene gestures or facial expressions, and being intentionally excluded. Bullying implies an imbalance of power or strength in which others victimize one child.” (Peterson & Skiba, 2000)

“*Classism* includes bias issues involving education, money, appearance, clothing and group or club memberships.” (Prutzman & Johnson, 1997)

Communal construct: “selflessness, openness, caring, affectionate, kindness, helpfulness, sympathy and a desire to be at one with others.” (Kirtley & Weaver, 1999)

Communication is the act of sharing or exchanging information or ideas

Conciliation: Unlike arbitration, is not always legally binding, and is not always decision driven, i.e., could be over divorced parents attempting to communicate about decisions in the life of their child. “ an informal involuntary negotiation process in which a third party attempts to bring the disputing parties together and facilitate communication by lowering tensions, carrying information between the parties and providing technical assistance and a safe environment in which to meet.” (Messing, 1993)

Conflict is serious “disagreements and problems resulting from divergent wishes or needs. (Bickmore, 2002)

Empathy: a personality characteristic that accurately predicts another's internal state, emotional identification with another individual, the process of cognitive role-taking and communicating a sense of understanding to another. (Sandole & van der Merwe, 1993 p. 97)

Hostility: symbolic aggression and includes irritability, negativism, resentment, and suspicion.

"*Mediation* is a process in which an impartial third party assists the disputants to come to a mutually agreed on resolution based upon their own creative thinking and problem solving." (Townley, 1994)

Negotiation: the parties voluntarily gather to bargain or problems-solve directly with one another until an agreeable settlement of the issues has been reached. (Messing, 1993)

Racism: the oppression or subjugation of a people based wholly on their race, or the racists perception of their race and may take place at the levels of individuals, groups and institutions. (Hansman, et al, 1999)
"...we define *racism* as power plus racial prejudice" Hansman, et al 1999)

School climate: "the feelings that students and staff have about the school environment over a period of time." (Peterson & Skiba, 2000)

Sex stereotypes: the assumption that certain behaviors are more likely to occur and occasionally more appropriate for one sex than for the other. (Nicoreta & Rancer, 1994)

Sexism: the discrimination or objectification of an individual or group based upon their sex, or perceived sex.

Stereotypes: results of information-processing shortcuts that allow individuals to select and interpret information from the large amount of information available.

Verbal aggression: predisposition to verbally attack the self-concepts of individuals, instead of, or in addition to, their positions on controversial issues; may come in the forms of character attacks, competence attacks, physical appearance attacks, profanity, ridicule, teasing, maledictions, threats, and nonverbal emblems.

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