

Full Length Research Paper

An investigation of conflict resolution in educational organizations

Saduman Kapusuzoglu

Abant Izzet Baysal University, Department of Educational Sciences, 14280 Golkooy - Bolu / Turkey. E-mail: sadumankapusuzoglu@gmail.com Tel: 00 90 374 254 10 00 ext:1651. Fax: 00 90 374 253 46 41.

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The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of Conflict Resolution Education (Peer Mediation) in schools on the behaviours of students. The study utilized semi-experimental design. The sample of this study consists of 203 eight grade secondary school students in one Primary Education School in Bolu province in Turkey. Voluntary students were chosen according to sociometric technique and given 30 hours peer mediation education. Two kinds of evaluation questionnaires developed by Taylı (2006) were utilized. The findings of the survey showed that peer mediation provider students found the process and effects of the process highly satisfying whereas the peer mediation receiver group found the process moderately satisfying experience in all assessed dimensions.

Key words: Organizational conflict, conflict resolution, conflict management, school.

INTRODUCTION

There is a review of related literature on rationale of this study, definition and sources of conflict, researches, conflict management styles and conflict resolution education (peer mediation) approaches and implementation of peer mediation program in schools.

The rationale of this study covers the following points:

1. Students need to know how to manage and resolve conflicts (Slyck and Stern, 1991),
2. Delinquency and violence are symptoms of a juvenile's inability to handle conflict constructively,
3. Peer mediation has repeatedly proven itself by reducing violence in schools. Teachers and administrators experience up to a 97% reduction in disciplinary incidences as students take responsibility for their own conflicts and arrive at agreements the majority of which are upheld months later (Thomas, 2008).
4. The effects of peers during the adolescence period has seen increasingly,
5. There is a need to train peer mediators in schools, because of the insufficient number of peer counselors and the high number of students peer counselor at schools,
6. Although there have been some research studies made in Turkey by Taylı (2006), Alada (2005), Pehlivan (2004), Kapusuzoglu (2004), Nazlı (2003), Öner (2003), there is a need to make new researches at different age group populations and from different dimensions.

What is conflict?

Conflict is certain as long as there is a human element present. Thus, conflict is a pervasive aspect in both social circles and professional interactions. As Landau, Landau and Landau (2001) stated, "Conflict exists in all human relationships: it always has and probably will" (Rose, Suppiah, Uli and Othman, 2006).

Conflict is not a phenomenon; it is inevitable when more than one person is involved in any enterprise or endeavor (Burnside, 2008). Conflict is normal, natural, necessary and the problem is not the existence of conflict but how we handle it (Mayer, 2008).

With the absence of a comprehensive definition of conflict, various definitions have been offered by many researchers from multiple disciplines. Some of these have originated from disciplines such as psychology, behavioral sciences, sociology, communication and anthropology. Several researchers such as Thomas (1976); Wall and Callister (1995); Vecchio (2000) and Rahim (2001) described conflict as a process. Thomas (1976) defined conflict as "the process which begins when one party perceives that the other is frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his." Wall and Callister (1995) viewed conflict as "a process in which

one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party.” Vecchio (2000) described conflict as “the process that results when one person (or a group of people) perceives that another person or group is frustrating, or about to frustrate an important concern.” Rahim (2001) looked at conflict as “an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities (that is individual, group, organization, etc.)” Drawing upon Donohue and Kolt (1992), conflict is defined as “a situation in which interdependent people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs or interests and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals” (Rose et al., 2006).

Why think about conflict?

Conflict is not in itself a bad thing. There are many reasons why it is a necessary part of the growth and development of individuals, families, communities and societies. Conflict can help build community, define and balance people’s needs as individuals with certain needs and as participants in larger systems, and help them face and address in a clear and conscious way the many difficult choices that life brings them.

Many benefits such as increasing of teaching time, ability to control one’s behaviour in conflict situations, enhancing of interpersonal communication skills, reduction of suspensions, improving of school climate, prevention of violence, reduction of detentions and improving the ability to respect different perspectives are achieved as a result of conflict management programs (Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management).

March and Simon (1969) are the thinkers who analytically examined the sources of conflict in organizations (Eren, 2003):

- 1.) Change is the factor that most often leads to conflict. Change is unsettling, sometimes threatening. Of course, it is inevitable and often highly desirable.
- 2.) A second factor which might cause institutional conflict is conflicting goals and objectives as well as opposing values and priorities. Often, if the interested parties earnestly desire to resolve such kinds of conflict; improved, honest and good-faith communication can be very helpful.
- 3.) A third source of conflict is limited resources. Limited resources can practically mean anything: Not enough security, lack of space, outdated equipment, and most often, lack of money (Burnside, 2008).

Researches

Researchers explain the practices of peer mediation drawing upon the theories of “Social Network” and “Social

Learning” (France and McCormick, 1997). Furthermore, there are also others who claim to draw upon the principles of behaviorist approach, along with these theories (Beitel, 1997).

There have been many research studies related to conflict, conflict management and conflict resolution education. For example; Kammerer (1998) examined the use of Conflict Management, a program teaching students communication skills, Schoenhaus (2001), summaries papers and discussions that explore the best training practices current and future. Cole (2001) examines conflict resolution: skill to reduce violence and violence-related behaviours, Schenkel (2000) determines the effect of a conflict resolution curriculum on aggressive behaviours, Argyris (1994) deals with improving conflict resolution skills of Primary Students through curriculum adaptation and teacher interventions. Johnson and Johnson (1996) concerns about conflict resolution and peer mediation programs in Elementary and Secondary Schools. Barron (2000) examined the impact of peer mediation training on adolescents’ problem solving skills, perception of school climate, and attitudes toward conflict management, likewise Salmivalli (1991) found that with peer mediation, students have more positive self-perceptions and their empathy skills improve, Sprinthall and Hall (1992) found that peer mediators became more psychologically mature and their awareness and perspective taking skills improve, Uysal (2006) examined the impact of conflict resolution training program on the conflict resolution skills of the 9th grade secondary school students. Foster-Harrison (1995), Conrad and Hadin (1982) and Fenzel and Hamilton (1988) showed that the service provider peer mediators had much more learning responsibility scores. Robinson and Morrow (1991) showed the scores of peer mediators increased. Lynn (1986) and Peterson and Skiba (1992), found that these applications supported the school systems and created positive classroom climate. This paper examines the necessity and applicability of conflict resolution education schools according to the opinions of students. The effects of education on the behaviours of students are equally examined.

Conflict management styles

There are various styles that can be used to manage conflicts. Among the early writers, Follett suggested three main ways to handle conflict: domination, compromise and integration. Moreover, she also found other such as avoidance and suppression.

Blake and Mouton (1964) were the first to present the conceptualization of the five conflict styles into an avoiding, obliging, dominating, compromising and integrating (Rose et al., 2006).

As suggested by Visinki (1995) one of the five methods of coping with conflict is competition. The competition approach to conflict resolution is an attempt at complete

victory. It is a win/lose approach, a “winner takes all” position. Usually, the focus is on winning the conflict at all costs, rather than seeking the most appropriate solution for everyone concerned. The second method of coping with conflict is accommodation, which is the opposite of competition. It is a lose/win approach. The third method is avoidance, where both sides in the conflict withdraw. It is referred to as the lose/lose outcome in managing conflict because neither side is able even to deal with the issue, much less manage or resolve it.

The fourth one is collaboration, which is usually considered the best method to cope with conflict. It is called a win/win approach. It does not require either side to give up a valued position. Rather, both sides honestly seek new and common higher grounds. This kind of problem-solving requires an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, the surfacing of hidden agendas, and a genuine willingness on both sides to resolve the conflict.

The fifth method is compromise-conflict resolution. It involves negotiation and a high degree of flexibility. It is referred to as the win/lose-win/lose position since both parties in the conflict will get some of what they want, while at the same time giving up something in the process (Burnside, 2008). In this paper, the last method has been analyzed both theoretically and practically.

An overview of conflict resolution

The heart of conflict resolution is the management of conflict. The Encyclopedia of Sociology (1992) reads: “Conflict theory explains social structure and changes it by arguing that actors pursue their interests in conflict with others and according to their resources for social organization” (Lorenzon, 2001).

Conflict resolution education

Conflict resolution education teaches the skills needed to engage in creative problem-solving. Parties to disputes learn to identify their interests, express their views, and seek mutually acceptable solutions (Lorenzon, 2001), being able to find a common ground with others, being able to reframe conflict as a mutual problem, being able to listen actively, empathic role-reversal skills, and impulse control.

Personality is an important part of learning to resolve conflicts. Friedman (2000) noted that individuals handle conflict based on their personality characteristics that act to increase and decrease stress.

General approaches to conflict resolution approach

These approaches are process curriculum, peaceable classroom, peaceable school and peer mediation. Pro-

grams often combine elements from these approaches.

Process curriculum

Educators teaching the principles and process of conflict resolution as a separate lesson or course are using the process curriculum approach. Argyris (1994) deals with improving conflict resolutions skills of Primary Schools through curriculum adaptation.

Peaceable classroom and peaceable school

It is a whole-classroom methodology that includes teaching students the foundation abilities, principles, and one or more of the three problem-solving processes of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution education is incorporated into the core subjects of the curriculum and into classroom management strategies. Evaluations of peaceable school programs showed significant benefits to participants, declined in conflicts and increases in positive behavior by students (Boeuf and Delany-Shabazz, 1997). In other words, conflict and peace are both defined and viewed against the backdrop of security and stability (Mumuni, 2005).

Implementation methods

All students are believed to learn peer mediation through special education and supervision. In a more structured project, primary school students learn more limited roles and require more supervision. Secondary and higher education levels, on the other hand, allow programs containing much more educational opportunities and broader alternatives (Foster and Harrison, 1995).

Implementation of the peer mediation program

Program development: According to Tindall (1995), a good program must have the following characteristics: First of all, each participant in the program should also participate in the planning process and the education program must have a special design. Supervision, evaluation and research must be a part of education and peer mediation program could measure the process and external problems. The ethical aspects of education and implementation should be properly considered and continuously controlled.

Tindall and Salmon-White (1990) assert that when initiating a new program, the first step consists of making a need analysis, defining the objectives, mapping out an implementation scheme, ensuring the participation of those involved. Kapusuzo lu (2004) found that the teachers and the managers have supported the implementa-

tion of peer mediation education program.

Program duration and level of participation

Peer mediation changes the duration, the objectives, content and implementation style of the education program. The subjects addressed and the target group also affect the duration of education. The duration also changes depending on the participant age group and the type of service to be provided. The duration of peer mediation practices in primary education programs usually consist of ten sessions (Downe, Altman and Nysetwold, 1986), while at secondary education level, as Myrick and Bowman (1983) suggest, in a practice aiming to use peers, it is enough for students to receive a 10 session education, each of which lasts for 30 - 35 min, at the orientation level.

Selection of peer mediators

According to Myrick and Erney (1985), students should be selected by considering their concern with others' well-being, the ability to listen to and understand others, flexibility, adaptability to new situations, self-confidence, responsibility, honesty and the potential for leadership.

Content of the program and training process

Ender and Newton (2000) maintain that the peer mediation training program should be based on three fundamental pillars, which are knowledge, skill and participation.

Basic knowledge needed to help others should include information about psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology and education. The second pillar is the ability to listen to others and, the skill to initiate and maintain communication, intercultural sensitivity, applied problem-solving strategies, group leadership and the ability to evaluate environmental conditions. The third factor in the assisting process is the personal traits of the mediator, his/her personal awareness, appropriate notion of self and motivation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to identify the views of the eight grade students of the primary education concerning the impact of conflict resolution education on their academic and social development.

Based on this primary purpose, answers to the following questions were sought:

1.) According to the views of the above, what is the impact of conflict resolution education on the academic and social development

of the service provider students?

2.) What is the impact of the service user students?

Participants

This study utilized a semi-experimental design and it was survey type of study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling techniques. The population of this study covers N = 203. 8th Grade students in the selected Primary Education School from 8 classes. Voluntary eight grade students were chosen according to certain criterias [such as developed by Tindall (1995)] self-esteem, self-awareness, awareness of others, empathy, communication and interaction skills (awareness of personal and cultural attitudes to conflict situations, ability to analyze and evaluate conflicts, working responsibility, being lived and respected by their friends) and 84 students who took the maximum score (vote) from their friends were determined.

This list was evaluated and approved by the Teachers Guide. Later, these selected students were informed about the purpose of the peer mediation training and application program and their roles in the program. They were given 30 h peer mediation education including helping behaviours, communication skills and ethic awareness. After receiving an education, students were given an opportunity of applying the learned mediation skills to the 203 students population.

Collection and analysis of the data

The data of this research was collected through two types of questionnaires developed by Tayli (2006) in the light of the questionnaires developed by Tindall (1995), Aladag (2005), Myrick and Erney (1985), D'andrea and Salovey (1996). Reliability and validity analyses were made by her ($r = 0.8672$). In this research, the first type of questionnaire applied to peer mediation service provider students, aimed to determine the impact of the training covered 37 items. These items were related to the necessity of the program, the effect of enhancing the students' self-confidence, increasing success, fulfilling individual social responsibilities, time management, acquisition of healthy life and working habits. The second type of questionnaire ($r = 0.8240$) applied to service user students covered 18 items. These items were related to the effects and contributions of service provider friends and the application on their attitudes and skills.

RESULTS

The results of the first questionnaire for the peer mediators will be discussed under 9 headings:

Peer mediation training

Peer mediators stated that they grasped their roles (88%), they believed that the assistance offered was needed (67%), and the documents used in the program were sufficient (44%), homework assigned during the program helped them better understand what they would do (59.5%), they knew that they should work in coordination with school psychological counselor (70.2%), they knew that peer mediation application had ethical rules (78.6%), they knew that their roles as peer mediators are being

friends, supporting others and being a role model for them (84.5%). There is a need to support this application with much more documents.

Impact of implementation personal responsibility

The students stated that they were now more aware of their responsibilities towards themselves (84.5%), they were more aware of their responsibilities towards their bodies and health (70.2%), they believed that they could better control their lives (71.4%) and they had better understood that they should acquire healthy life habits (69%). The awareness and development related to personal responsibility on behalf of the students can be thought as one of the most important impacts of this application.

Impact of implementation on social responsibility

The students that they had more fully realized that helping others was a fundamental moral value (82.1%), the program made them realize that they had responsibilities towards others (70.2%), they were more sensitive towards their schoolmates' problems (86.9%) and they were more respectful towards their schoolmates' rights (83.3%). It is important for ethical and social development of the students.

Impact of implementation on emphatic communication

The peer mediators stated that they felt more comfortable in communicating others (70.2%), they were more careful about others' feelings while speaking (70.2%), they thought that the program created a more friendly classroom environment (63.1%). It is important for the students to acquire and use the communication skills.

Impact of implementation on self confidence of peer mediators

The peer mediators thought that the program increased their self confidence (67.9%), they stated that helping others made them feel more happy (58.3%), they loved themselves more (67.9%). It brings both personal and social awareness.

Impact of implementation on academic achievement and working habits

The students thought that the program affected their success positively (40.5%), 25% of them were undecided, they stated that they were more planned in issues

about education (67.9%), they started to use time more effectively (57.1%). It is hoped that students learn to use their time in a more planned way.

Implementation dimension

The students stated that they had difficulties in reaching their friends during the application (42%), 31% of them were undecided. It can be appreciated that the students aren't used to participate in this kind of activity. They declared that during the application, they spoke to their friends about their responsibilities and living their lives better as much as they could (73.8%), they stated that they had positive effects on their friends as a result of the application (73.8%), they said that their friends to whom they talked about the application didn't want to listen to them (79.8%), 76.2% of them wanted their friends to participate in the same application as well.

Peer mediation application was assessed by the views of service user students. The service user students stated that peer mediation application were useful for their classes (89.7%). They stated that it created a positive classroom atmosphere (52.2%), peer mediation wasn't used as an instrument of personal power (36.9%), they came to be more careful about each other's rights after the program was effective in the efficient use of time (52.2%).

Evaluation of peer mediation implementation process

The students stated that their peer mediator friends talked to them about their responsibilities (48.8%), their peer mediator friends informed them on increasing success (46.3%) their peer mediator friends were exemplary for them to fulfill their responsibilities (59.1%). They also stated that peer mediation program were useful for their class (89.7%) and it was necessary (75.4%).

Impact of peer mediation program on personal responsibilities

They stated that they started to fulfill their responsibilities more after the program (60.6%), the program helped them develop healthy life habits (49.3%) the program helped them use time effectively (52.2%). These are the important impacts of the application on behalf of the students.

DISCUSSION

The findings obtained have been discussed in the light of the literature and findings of the researches. The vast majority of students have accepted to help their friends as a humanistic mission. This understanding has reflected

the constructive profile of the students. Students have declared the peer mediation application have had positive impact on their academic success.

Clark (2003) has explained that peer mediation application has created a positive school climate, positive school climate has increased the motivation accordingly and as a result it has increased the academic success. Glasser (1999) has thought that if the needs of students related to being selected and supported would be met, they would be successful.

The opinions of the service user students have been assessed. The findings have shown that the peer mediation application has increased the feeling of responsibility. This finding has been supported by the findings of Foster, Harrison (1995), Conrad and Hedin (1982) and Hamilton and Fenzel (1988) related to the significant increase on the responsibility scores of the service provider students.

The service provider students have declared that they have felt themselves much more relax than before. The findings of the researches made by Robinson and Morrow (1991) have supported this finding. According to this finding, there has been a significant increase in the scores of the students in the applied before and after the application.

The finding of this research has shown that peer mediation application has created a positive school / classroom climate and supported the school system. The researches made by Lynn (1986) has supported this finding.

Similarly, the findings of this research have shown that personal perceptions and emphatic skills of the service provider students have been developed much more through this application. This finding has been supported by the findings of the researches made by Salmivalli (1991); Öner (2003) and Alada (2005).

As stated by Turner (1999) and Thompson (1996) the self confidence and problem solving skills, time-management skills of the service provider students have developed. Similarly, peer mediators have matured psychologically and personal awareness has increased as stated by the findings of this research. This finding has been supported by Sprinthall and Hall (1992).

The service provider and service user students have been eager to take part in the peer mediation training program and they have supported to continue the program. Most of the students have declared that they have needed peer mediators (Nazlı, 2003).

As supported by the research made by Morey and Miller (1993), there have been a moderate level of satisfaction in all of the dimensions of peer mediation application on behalf of service user students.

However, as Girard (1995) notes, the full benefits of conflict resolution may depend on the inclusion of this subject in the pre-service curriculum and require more comprehensive training, support of teachers, directors, and parents. Moreover, there is a lack of evaluative studies on the impacts of conflict resolution on schools in

order to improve the effectiveness of these applications. The effects of education on teacher perceptions of student behaviour should be examined. Similar studies should be conducted both in elementary and high school at the population at different grades.

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