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# Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Peer Mediation Program in a Elementary School

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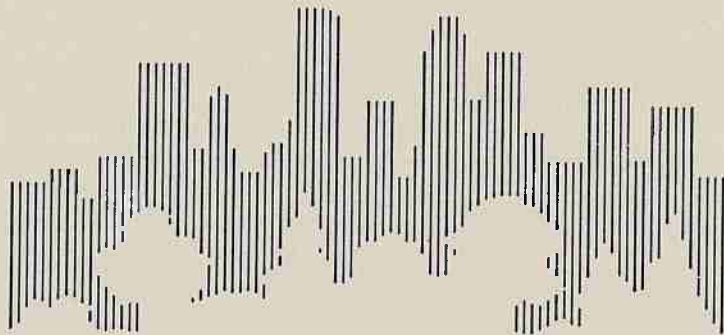
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**MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK  
THESIS**

**Dawn E. Berg**

**Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Peer Mediation Program  
in an  
Elementary School**

**1995**

**Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Peer Mediation Program  
in an  
Elementary School**

**M.S.W. Thesis**

**by**

**Dawn E. Berg**

**A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty**

**of**

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**for the Degree of**

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**MASTERS OF SOCIAL WORK**

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**MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA**

**CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL**

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of :

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirements for the Master of Social Work Degree.

Date of Oral Presentation:

8/8/95

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In dedication to the memory of my mother,

Sylvia Corrine Engen Kuhnly.

In her heart, she was a "social worker" and by profession she was a great first and second grade teacher. She worked hard for peace and justice for all people, no matter what race, religion, culture, or economic standard. She was truly a peacemaker.

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And finally, many thanks to you Chuck; without you I would not have made it through these two years !!

My thanks to all!!

Dawn E. Berg  
August 8, 1995

## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Peer Mediation Program  
in an Elementary School.

by

Dawn E. Berg

August, 1995

With the rise of violence in our society, communities, schools, and homes, we are challenged to find peaceful ways to resolve conflicts and learn how to live cooperatively with one another. Peer mediation programs in schools have been used as part of the solution to this challenge of preventing violence. This research study surveyed students who were trained as peer mediators and their parents to identify their perceptions of the effectiveness of a Peer Mediation Program at Sibley Elementary School in Albert Lea, Mn. Data analysis was limited by the small sample size and lack of comparison; however, findings did yield students' and parents' positive perceptions of the program and transfer of some skills from school to home. Evaluating conflict resolution programs in school settings gives school social workers more insight of ways to prevent violence in schools and homes, assess students and families on acquired skills in resolving conflicts in peaceful ways, and evaluate peer mediation programs for their worth in time, money, and resources.

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Research Study

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- C. Sibley School Letter of Approval
- D. Consent Form

"If we are to reach real peace in the world we shall have to begin with children."

Mahatma Gandhi

Conflict resolution, violence prevention, and peer mediation are current and popular topics in society and schools. Peer mediation is a specific program that is being implemented in schools throughout the nation, as a potential means of violence prevention. Mediation programs have served communities and neighborhoods as alternative dispute resolution centers, are used with families as an alternative to divorce courts and with juvenile delinquents and their families, with business and labor, and on the international scene with countries in conflict. We are discovering the imperative need to teach children in today's society the skills of resolving conflicts in peaceful ways (Cahoon, 1987/88; Carter, 1993; Faconti & Hagerstrand, 1987; Glass, 1994; Hearn & Panizzon, 1989; Miller, 1993; Williams, 1991; Willis, 1993).

Peer mediation and resolving conflicts in peaceful ways are an outgrowth of cooperative learning in education. Cooperation in schools is important for children to learn not only for academics, but also as a life skill as the future

citizens of the world (Deutsch,1993; Johnson & Johnson,1993 & 1991; Johnson, Johnson & Holubec,1990; Lyman & Foyle,1990; Kreidler,1984; Maruyama,1992; Slavin,1987). We all need to resolve conflicts in peaceful and cooperative ways living as family members, neighbors in a community, team members in our places of employment, or as countries working with each other.

Peer mediation has also been implemented to assist in improving discipline and decreasing violence in schools. Peer mediation has been implemented as an alternative to metal detectors and reducing suspensions (Cook County Sheriff's Youth Services Department,1993; Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, & Burnett,1992; Merina,1995; McDonald & Moriarty,1990; NEA Teacher-to-Teacher Books,1994).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate a peer mediation program in an elementary school (K-5 grades) with about 500 students. The study investigated the impact of the Peer Mediation Program at Sibley Elementary on the student peer mediators and their families. The study surveyed the two groups about the peer mediation program, what skills they learned, if they practiced these skills with others and if the skills were beneficial.

Peer mediation programs in schools do not materialize quickly, and all parties involved, staff, students, parents, and community members, need training, time for studying, planning, implementing and evaluating. A clear understanding of the background and history of mediation and conflict

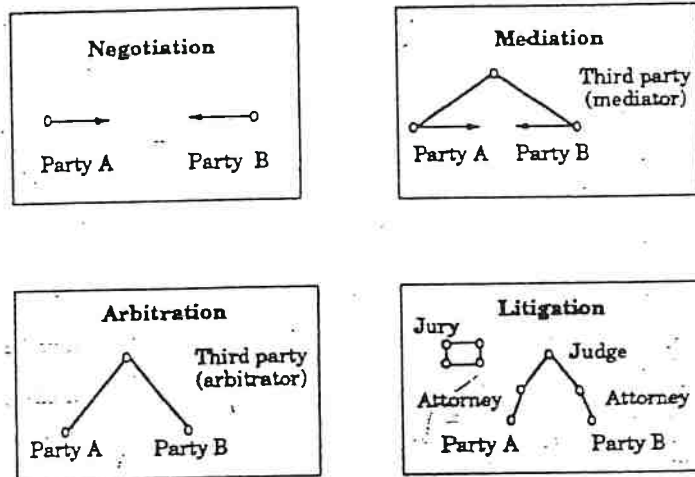
resolution and theories gives a framework for programs to operate with and evaluate their intended effectiveness and purpose.

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Peer mediation is based on four different theories: conflict theory, cooperative learning, problem solving, and family systems. These theories are all interrelated and rely on conflict theory as the basis. Conflict theory includes conflict resolution, alternative dispute resolution, mediation and negotiation concepts. Morton Deutsch is renowned as the "father" of conflict theory, as he did a considerable amount of research and written work in this area. His work covered cooperative and competitive processes, intrapsychic and inter group conflicts, distinguishing destructive and constructive conflicts, and other factors that influences the resolution of conflict. One of his ideas sounds like the social work term of parallel process. Deutsch's crude law of social relations states " the characteristic processes and effects elicited by a given type of social relationship (cooperative or competitive) tend also to elicit that type of social relationship." (Deutsch, 1973). Morton Deutsch recently wrote an article for schools outlining four basic principles for educating and preparing children to live in a peaceful world. He believes schools need to emphasize cooperative learning, conflict resolution training, constructive use of controversy in teaching

subjects, and mediation programs (Deutsch,1993).

Another area of conflict theory is clarifying the difference between negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and litigation. Figure 1. illustrates the differences (Parsons,1987, p. 484).

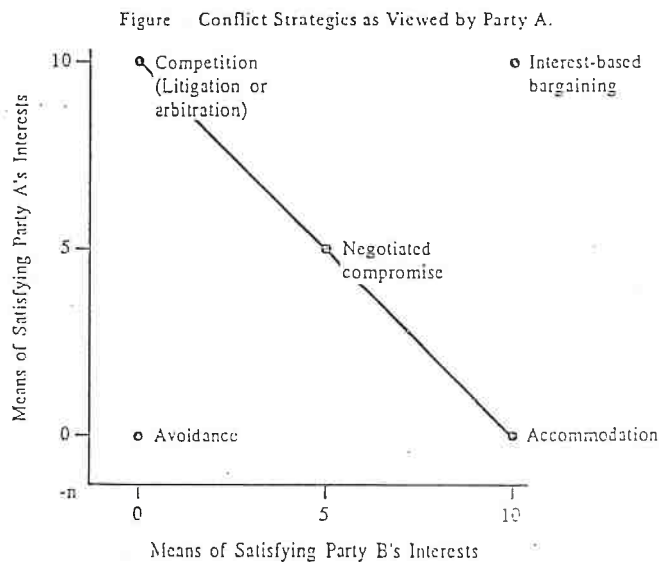


Negotiation is resolving a conflict between two disputing parties with no one else to help in the process. This is the most typical way of resolving conflicts whether it's between friends, siblings, parent-child, workers, labor and management, or between countries. Mediation is an intervention of a dispute by an acceptable, impartial and neutral third party who has no authoritative decision-making power to assist the disputing parties in voluntarily reaching their own mutually acceptable solutions, as defined by Moore (1987), a professional mediator. Chandler, a professor of Social Work, gives her definition of mediation as a technique of joint advocacy for handling conflict between people by providing a neutral forum in which disputants are encouraged to find a mutually satisfactory solution to their

problems (Chandler,1985). She stresses the relevance of mediation and social work in that both are empowering and self determination of outcomes is important.

Arbitration and litigation involve third parties who make judgements and decisions for the two disputing parties.

These methods are based on a win-win model of collaboration or interest-based bargaining. The process of negotiation and mediation is just as important as the results in that two disputing parties air their grievances to each other, communicate their feelings, listen to each other, explore differences and options, and decide on solutions that both parties agree to. Different strategies to resolve conflicts are illustrated in Figure 2 (Moore,1986, p. 68).



Mediation is an empowerment skill that is important for social workers to understand and use. Parsons (1991) defines mediation as a problem-solving intervention that is based on conflict theory. A mediator can be a collaborator, conferee, enabler, or a broker and advocate on a continuum of mediation

as the situation demands. A social worker can be a mediator with clients, as a community organizer in an advocacy role, or as a school social worker organizing and supporting mediation programs with students, staff and families.

There are cases when negotiation and mediation should not be used and litigation serves better to protect victims or provide sanctions when laws are broken.

Some common assumptions of conflict resolution theory are: conflict is neutral, is neither bad nor good, can be useful or destructive depending on how people handle it, is complex and a natural part of life, and most of us have been taught the fight or flight responses to conflict instead of win-win solutions (Twin Cities ESR, 1992). Other important assumptions are to bargain over interests, not positions and separate the problem from the person (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

Peer mediation has evolved from cooperative learning concepts in the education field. Cooperative learning gives a classroom and school a climate in which resolving conflicts in peaceful ways can happen more easily. It lends itself to win/win solutions, taking others' perspectives, promoting democratic processes, and it empowers students in acquiring negotiation skills, increases self-esteem, and is an effective learning tool for academic achievement (Deutsch, 1973 & 1993; Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990; Kreidler, 1984; Maruyama, 1992; Moriarty & McDonald, 1991; NEA Teacher-to-Teacher Books, 1994).

Cooperative learning has five essential components for a group to function cooperatively. A cooperative group would have positive interdependence; face-to-face promotion of interaction, learning, and success; personal responsibility and accountability; interpersonal and social skills; and group processing (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990). These five components certainly lend themselves to resolving conflicts and prevention of violence.

Many researchers and professionals have made an important link to cooperative learning and gang violence and working with violent or aggressive children. One of the leading causes of violence seems to be the isolation of children, from their parents and adults, from peers, from society. By creating an environment of positive interdependence, this isolation can be overcome (Astor, 1995; Brendtro & Long, 1995; Johnson & Johnson, 1993 & 1995; Wodarski & Hedrick, 1987).

Another positive impact of cooperative learning is not only improving academics and social relations, but all around school climate (Glasser, 1986 & 1990; Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Slavin, 1987). Johnson and Johnson (1991) summed it up : "Without cooperation and the skills that it requires, life in a society or a school would be impossible."

The third theory that peer mediation is based on is problem solving. Peer mediation training introduces skills for problem solving, such as communication skills. These include active listening, reflective feedback, using "I" messages, asking about feelings and events, restating



messages, and helping disputants brainstorm for solutions (Araki,1990; Davis & Porter,1985; Faconti & Hagerstrand, 1987; Miller,1993; Shure & Spivack, 1980; Stephens,1993; Tabachnick,1990). Important skills for peer mediators to acquire are; finding creative options for the conflicts, looking at different perspectives and arriving at solutions that both parties agree to. Students build leadership skills by working out real-life conflicts using these skills (Crary,1992; Morton & Grace,1988; Rose, 1987; Savoie & Hughes,1994; Stein & Kostelnik,1984).

Other important aspects of leadership skills that mesh with peer mediation are students helping each other out and self-control. Peers seem to be able to talk their own language rather than the language they use in talking to adults (Davis & Porter,1985; Lane & McWhirter,1992). Peer mediators learn self-discipline through the training they receive and the practice as mediators. Students model self-discipline for other students, too (Glass,1994; Maxwell,1989).

Mediation as a problem solving intervention has been used more in social work since the late 70's (Parson,1991). Often times, social workers are seen as mediators in society as advocating or facilitating between different parties. One area of difference in problem solving and mediation is an example from Compton and Galloway (1989). They suggest that problem solving is a process that client and social worker do together in defining and solving. Mediation would look at

the client defining the problem and empowering the client to solve their own problem. Similarities of these two concepts are: their adherence to the value of confidentiality; both have a goal identification and a planning stage in their procedures, both concepts value expression of feelings and improve communication, and both emphasize the importance of their clients to take responsibility for development of an action plan.

Problem solving for peer mediators can be summed up by Peggy Cahoon(1987/88)," problems must be solved with the head and the heart and not the hand." Problems need to be solved using knowledge, understanding and talking, not by physical force.

The fourth theory is the family systems theory or home/school partnership. Involvement of the families, parents and siblings is starting to be evaluated and valued. A criticism of violence prevention programs has been the lack of connection and involvement of parents and families in conflict resolution programs in schools (Posner,1994). Parents need to be taught problem solving or conflict resolution skills and some parents need even more intensive parenting skills. The focus is not to be just on students' skills, but all staff and parents' skills. Children learn what is modeled for them. By parents becoming involved in the conflict resolution programs in the schools, they will have an understanding of the philosophy and concepts of the program, will be able to support the school and their

children, and could learn new skills to implement at home and in the community (Alexander & Curtis,1995; Brendtro & Long,1995; Caudle,1994; Cutrona & Guerin,1994; Curwin,1995; Lindquist & Molnar,1995;).

Family systems theory is from the social work field and is the basis for school social workers, who become the link between the educational and social work fields. Working with families is what social workers are trained to do and can link educators and families in understanding each other. In violence prevention, this linkage between home and school is important for soliciting parents' support for programs in the schools, helping parents understand and use new skills, such as mediation, and sending clear messages of what is acceptable behavior of children (Alexander & Langford, 1992; Alexander & Curtis, 1995).

Past parent-child mediation programs have been for children, usually adolescents, who are already in trouble as juvenile offenders or mediation has been used in divorce cases, settling custody differences (Fisher,1987; Kilpatrick & Pippin,1987; Merry,1987; Phear,1985; Wagner, 1990; Zetzel,1985). Mediation as a technique in working with families has started to be used in the family therapy field (Girdner,1986; Grebe, 1986).

For school/home partnerships in the educational field, conflict resolution skills are promoted as parent education for all parents and especially for families in crisis. Some excellent resources for families to prevent violent behavior

are available as teaching conflict resolution skills to all family members (Beeckman & Holmes,1993; Crary,1984; Schmidt & Friedman,1989). Systems theory looks at the concept of school as a community of families (Constable & Walberg,1991). This perspective helps us keep in mind that schools, families, and students are interactive and influenced by conflict resolution strategies common in the larger culture and global domain.

The next section gives an overview of the history and background of mediation and describes different models of mediation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### History

Mediation is "an old art revitalized" (Blades,1984). Mediation has been around since the Bible and Koran times. In ancient China, the Confucians viewed the best way to settle disputes was by moral persuasion and agreement and not coercion. Mediation is practiced today in the People's Republic of China through the People's Conciliation Committees (Folberg,1983).

In Japan, mediation has a rich history. The leaders of the villages were expected to help community members mediate problems. Today in Japan, the importance of mediation continues, as Japan has more flower arrangers than lawyers, because they use mediation more than litigation to settle disagreements.

In some parts of Africa, neighborhood meetings were used for resolving conflicts. This was successful because of the extended kinship circles typical of the African villages.

The extended family was used to help with resolving conflicts in many cultures in past generations. This is another change in today's society as families and businesses look for help outside the family for resolution of disputes rather than extended family.

For centuries, Christian and Jewish families have looked

to their churches or temples for help in resolving conflicts. Mediation is well supported in the Bible and the Koran as an optimal way to handle differences. In the United States, religious groups have been early models of mediation. The Quakers have used mediation as their main way of settling disputes since arriving in the U.S. In 1920, The Jewish Conciliation Board in New York City was established as a mediation forum for all problems brought to them (Folberg,1983).

The most common model for mediation in the United States has been in the labor-management-business field. Before the World Wars, many bloody strikes and conflicts had occurred between labor and management. In 1947, the U.S. government established an independent agency called the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service to settle disputes. One of the pioneers in the business world of mediation was Mary Follet, a business consultant, who in 1924, wrote to managers about using "win-win" solutions in the workplace. She did not coin the term, but talked about the principle of finding solutions that were mutually satisfying to both parties, using their interests, rather than arguing over positions.

These are the principles that Fisher and Ury (1981) from the Harvard Negotiation Project wrote about for businesses in their famous book, Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In (Roderick,1988).

In the 1960's and 70's, the antiwar movement, peace groups, civil rights movement, and the proliferation of

community organizers helping people to advocate for themselves all helped the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) movement blossom. In 1976, Warren E. Burger, then the chief justice of the Supreme Court, organized the "Pound Conference" in St. Paul, Mn. on "the Causes of Popular Dissatisfaction of the Administration of the Justice System." This conference was named after Roscoe E. Pound who had talked with the legislature in 1906 about finding alternative ways of settling conflicts beside the overcrowded court system. This conference brought together unlikely bedfellows such as lawyers, civil rights leaders, and judges (Brown,1982; Singer,1989). The American Bar Association has taken an active interest in mediation and has implemented mediation as a legitimate part of law training.

The Carter Administration promoted the funding of neighborhood justice centers through the Dispute Resolution Act of 1980 which advocated that people of the community solve their problems via mediation rather than the courts (Brown,1982; Duffy, Grosch,& Olczak,1991; Maxwell,1989; Moore,1986;). Today there are over 350 centers operating in the U.S. resolving conflicts such as family and divorce cases, community problems, landlord-tenant disputes, and business concerns.

Neighborhood centers made mediation available while the overloaded court system made mediation a necessary option for divorce and custody cases (Brown,1992; Wagner,1990). Another area in using mediation with families is mediating with

juvenile offenders and the victims or families (Kilpatrick & Pippin,1987; Merry,1987; Phear,1985; Shaw,1985; Smith,1991; Stahler, DuCette, & Povich,1990). The Children's Hearings Project in Cambridge, Massachusetts started in 1981 as a way to mediate youth and family conflicts instead of going to court (Umbreit,1991).

Another major influence on the ADR movement was the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and his work with nonviolence, Martin Luther King and his work with the civil rights movement, and in 1978, President Carter's astounding work in using mediation principles resulting in the Camp David Accords. President Carter worked for 13 days on mediating with Menachim Begin from Israel and Anwar Sadat from Egypt- two ancient foes who attained win-win solutions through mediation (Carter,1993; Roderick,1988).

Peer mediation in schools evolved from the neighborhood centers and the cooperative learning theory in education. The Quakers' Children Creative Response to Conflict started in 1972 as a program to instruct teachers and children alternative ways to handle disputes and decrease punitive discipline. In 1982, a collaborative effort between a neighborhood mediation center, The Community Boards, and a school system resulted in the San Francisco Conflict Managers Program. In 1983, a collaborative effort between the Victim Service Agency and a school system in New York City resulted in the School Mediators' Alternative Resolution Team called SMART (Maxwell,1989).



Two other events helped promote peer mediation and conflict resolution programs in schools. One was the establishment of the organization, Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR) in 1981 which was composed of teachers and parents looking for alternatives to nuclear war and resolving conflicts in peaceful ways. The other was the establishment of the organization of NAME-National Association of Mediation in Education in 1984 (Maxwell,1989). NAME now publishes research studies, curriculum, manuals, books, and presents workshops. In 1984, there were only about a half a dozen well established school based mediation programs. By 1988, there were more than 200 programs and as of 1994, there are over 5,000 programs.

### Models of Mediation

#### International/Business

On the international level, mediation has been widely used since President Carter's example of the Camp David Accords. Many centers for promoting international peace have started up all dedicated to resolving conflicts in peaceful ways. Jimmy Carter started the Carter Center in 1982 in Atlanta, Georgia. This center has monitored democratic elections in Panama, Nicaragua, Zambia, Haiti, Guyana and other countries; mediated conflicts in many countries; promoted food, shelter, health care, and environmental protection around the world, and established the Atlanta Project in Atlanta, Georgia as a fight against urban poverty and violence (Carter,1993).The

Carter Center also established the International Negotiations Network (INN) Council composed of famous world leaders whose mission is to "seek peaceful ways to reduce civil conflicts and to prevent smaller-scale disputes from escalating into wars" (Carter,1993,p. 115). Their main principle in attaining this mission is to mediate for win-win settlements.

Conflict resolution and mediation programs have flourished as more universities and colleges are offering courses on this subject, especially for international studies, such as the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada (Mandell & Fisher,1992). Harvard Law School has a separate program called " The Program of Negotiation" which works at improving the theory and practice of negotiation and conflict resolution through several projects. They have worked with Jimmy Carter on the INN mediating in civil wars in many countries, instrumental in promoting the use of ADR techniques with South Africa, have promoted international conferences on Alternative Dispute Resolution, and published research studies, books and curriculum. The most popular have been Fisher and Ury's 1981 book and recently, Ury's 1991 Getting Past No: Negotiating Your Way from Confrontation to Cooperation. This Program is also the founder of The Negotiation Journal published by Plenum Publishing Corporation of New York. Other projects of this Program have impacted businesses and public agencies in resolving conflicts using win-win strategies (The Program on

Negotiation at Harvard Law School, 1994).

Another historical event that has impacted the heightened interest in alternative dispute resolution is the ending of the Cold War between the USSR and the U.S.A. The November, 1991 issue of The Annals of the American Academy of Political & Social Science (Zartman,1991) was dedicated to articles on resolving international conflicts. Each article talks about how conflicts were resolved or attempted to be resolved in various countries around the world using face-to-face talks.

### Family Mediation

Family mediation evolved in the 1960's and 1970's due to the increasing awareness of therapy and family counseling, no-fault divorce, and the increasing overload on the court system involving families; juveniles and parents and divorcing couples. A few early pioneers in 1969, such as Coulson, an attorney, and Fuller, a professor at Harvard, wrote books about using mediation instead of the court system with couples going through divorces. An early family mediation program, called The Bridge, started in 1970 in Atlanta by three family counselors. O.J. Coogler was one of the founding directors and later he created a private divorce mediation center in 1974 in Atlanta. Coogler was an attorney and a marriage/family counselor and is credited with starting the first divorce/family mediation center in the U.S. (Brown,1982).

Many of the early research studies and evaluations of

family mediation programs agreed that mediation is an effective means for resolving divorce and family disputes. Many of the studies showed mediation costing less, resulting in better feelings of fair agreements concerning property and custody and more satisfaction compared with traditional courtroom divorces (Brown,1982). There was such great success with mediation that in 1980 and in 1981, two states, Massachusetts and California, mandated mediation of all custody/visitation disputes. Another study done on the Maine Supreme Court studied 503 divorce cases that used mediation instead of typical court procedures from 1985-1987. The outcomes were extremely successful with only 15 to 25 percent of the cases being contested in a trial. Otherwise, the balance of the cases were mediated with successful agreements. Some characteristics of this program that contribute to its success are: it's a mandatory program before going to court, less time and money is used up on attorney fees, and attorneys cooperate and support this program, often helping their clients with the mediation process (Wagner,1990).

Divorces have historically been very confrontational, blaming, and adversarial. Divorce is emotional, filled with rules, and affects family processes and interactions. Divorce mediation is very successful because it is not bound by legal redtape, and helps with airing feelings and communicating needs; families can create unique solutions that work for them and not be concerned about setting law

precedents; and the process is not looking for blame or winner/loser outcome, but rather how all family members can win (Folberg, 1983). A recent issue has been standards for mediators. The Academy of Family Mediators has established these standards in the last ten years.

Another model of family mediation is parent/child mediation, used between youth who are status offenders and their parents and with juvenile delinquents and their parents. Status offenders are youth who are charged with minor offenses that are not crimes for adults, such as, running away, being truant or rebellious.

One of the earliest programs is the Children's Hearing Project which started in 1981 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Evaluations of this project in 1985 showed high success with families. Family members learned new ways of interacting and communicating with each other, they liked the process and they saw their agreements as fair and balanced. There were 51 families involved in this evaluation and 90% of the family members evaluated the mediation as a good process (Merry, 1987; Phear, 1985; Umbreit, 1991; Zetzel, 1985).

The most common use of mediation with juvenile delinquents is the use of victim-offender mediation. The juvenile offenders have face-to-face mediation sessions in which feelings and issues are aired and solutions for compensations are agreed upon. Research studies show that family members adhere to their agreements, problems are solved, and mediation makes a difference in the family members' ability

to get along with less fighting and arguing (Smith,1991).

One of the key issues of parent-child mediation is the imbalance of power. Mediation adheres to the principles of keeping the process non-threatening, non-blaming, keeping balance and neutrality. The important factor in mediation is not power but focusing on the needs of the parties. The needs of both parents and children are equally real and painful. Mediation often uncovers deeper needs of a family such as for medical services, treatment, or counseling (Shaw,1985).

Family mediation is the emerging synthesis of the mental health orientation and the legal orientation. This synthesis is a new paradigm for restructuring the family and the process of negotiating agreement (Girdner,1986). Some mediation teams consist of a lawyer and social worker/counselor as co-mediators (Brown,1982). Family mediation and therapy have their distinct differences, such as, therapy is insight-oriented, past-oriented and feeling-oriented while mediation is problem solving, task-oriented and is here-and-now-oriented. Some types of family therapy such as strategic therapy have their similarities and complement each other. Strategic therapy, like mediation, is problem-oriented; doesn't explore background, but the presenting problem; is action-oriented, not feeling-oriented or intrapsychic; is empowering, respectful and assumes people are capable; defines problems in behavioral terms, uses directives and not interpretations of motivation; and is brief and intensive (Grebe, 1986). Mediation has also been

used in cases of child abuse prevention. High risk families have successfully used trained volunteer mediators in improving family relations and reducing the potential of abuse (Stahler, DuCette, Povich,1990).

### Community/Neighborhood

Many neighborhood justice centers started as alternatives to the overloaded court system. The law system, judges, lawyers and police often referred disputing parties for minor problems to the neighborhood centers. One of the leading neighborhood centers was the San Francisco Community Boards which was started in 1977 by Ray Shonholtz. Contrary to most neighborhood centers, these Boards have more referrals from the general neighborhood and individuals. Each case goes in front of a panel of five local residents who are trained in mediation skills. About 200 cases go to the Community Boards each year. There are four steps in the hearing process: define the problem, understand each other, share the responsibility of resolving the problem and working out an agreement (Umbreit,1991). Over 350 neighborhood centers have been operating in the U.S. in the last ten years, giving rise to mediation programs in the next logical "community", the schools (Singer,1989).

### Schools-Mediation and Conflict Resolution Programs.

There are many anecdotal reports of peer mediation programs working successfully in schools (Cahoon,1987-88;

Davis & Porter,1985;Faconti & Hagerstrand,1987; Glass,1994; Hearn & Panizzon,1989; Koch & Miller,1987; Mednick,1992; Miller,1993; Roderick,1987-88; Stephens,1993; Stichter, 1986;). These programs have been touted as successfully "dealing with everything from playground conflicts to racial incidents-even gang fights" (Williams,1991). Dispute resolution is being used to teach even young children, preschool and kindergarten age, ways to resolve conflicts in mediated or peaceful ways (Davis,1986; Eisenberg & Garvey,1981; Shure & Spivack,1980). Some people have even gone as far as to propose that conflict resolution needs to be taught in every school in every grade and is as important as reading, writing, and arithmetic and should be the fourth "R" in school curriculum (Davis & Porter,1984; Longabaugh,1988).

While there is overwhelming support for peer mediation programs, there are also some reservations about the program. Some schools are hesitant about involving students in any discipline procedures and view mediation as a threat to discipline and authority of the teacher or principal (Moriarty & McDonald,1991). Other concerns are programs that do not evaluate themselves and their effectiveness, programs that do not involve families in transferring and using conflict resolution skills at home, and viewing peer mediation programs as the answer to violence in schools (Posner,1994).



Many curriculums and programs are started with no design or evaluation in place. This has certainly been true of peer mediation programs. Up to 1989, Lam (1989) reported only 14 programs in the U.S. and Canada with an evaluation component in it (Tolson, McDonald, & Moriarty, 1992). The results of these fourteen programs were positive: positive effects on student mediators, student body, and teachers. The qualitative and anecdotal evidence was stronger than the quantitative data (Lam, 1989). Half of the studies showed positive effects on the student mediators' attitudes toward conflict, self image, problem solving skills, leadership skills, and sensitivity to others. These programs also had positive impacts on the student body, decrease in number of fights, and more time for teachers to instruct rather than discipline.

Eight of the 14 programs also provided data on the success rate of the mediation process. The rates ranged from 58 % to 93%. The mediation process is judged successful if the disputing parties agree to a written solution and it is still holding up at the time of follow-up. Many research studies seem to study the impact of these programs on students, teachers and school climate, rather than how successful the mediation process is (Lam, 1989). Five of these studies from other states and another country that Lam collected data from and reviewed are further described: Arizona, Canada, Idaho, New Mexico, and Hawaii. All of these studies used elementary/middle/junior high age children.

The Arizona study (McCormick, 1988) was implemented at Wakefield Junior High which has a large percentage of Mexican-American students. Twenty five students were trained as peer mediators in an 18 hour workshop. The mediators met every morning for 20 minutes after training. The only curriculum given to the entire student body was three role plays at a general assembly to introduce the program. The program had 8 evaluation goals which were all to assess a part of the program or its impact in some way. One unique goal was to assess the effect of this program on "at-risk" peer mediators and "at-risk" disputants. The other goals were more common goals that other programs assessed, such as, changes in attitudes and behaviors of students, implementation of the program, evaluate peer mediators skills, evaluate student body and teachers' awareness and use of the program, disputant satisfaction with the program, change in the number of aggressive conflicts, and change in attitude toward using problem solving conflict style.

Measurements of these goals were accomplished by four methods: observations, interviews, surveys, and documented data. There was no control group. Observations were informal and gave anecdotal evidence of the peer mediators applying the training. Interviews were with teachers and students (mediators and disputants) after the program started. Surveys were given to the peer mediators, disputants and at-risk students, using pretest/posttest Likert-types scales assessing changes in student attitudes toward conflict style,

self esteem, and conflict activity. Open-ended surveys were given to peer mediators assessing the programs. Documentary data included number of referrals before and after for fighting, mediation referrals, and mediators' report forms.

Results of the goals of this program were positive, such as decrease in reported aggression incidents, disputants were satisfied with the mediation process, mediators were adequately trained, positive effect with the at-risk mediators and disputants, and no statistical change in students attitudes towards conflict styles. Most students favored the collaborative style already.

The Canadian study (Kalmakoff & Shaw,1997) was done in Burnaby, British Columbia with two elementary schools (grades4-6). A peer mediation program was not set up, but rather all students were taught negotiation skills using a 28 lesson curriculum, "Peer Conflict Resolution through Creative Negotiation". The 140 students were taught by the project staff twice per week for 40 minutes. Classroom teachers did observations and a video camera was used for feedback and teaching.

The measures for this study consisted of observations, interviews, pretest/posttest assessments and questionnaires. The students were observed in classrooms and on playground for two weeks before the project started investigating students' conflicts. The project staff also interviewed the students, teachers, principals, and non-teaching staff about students' ways of solving conflicts. The assessment tests

consisted of questions about how the students would handle conflicts. The questionnaires were mailed to the parents asking about any noted behavior changes after the program.

The results of this project reflected positive comments from students, teachers and parents attributed to the project. The assessment tests showed overall improvements, 18% for the girls and 9% for the boys. Thirteen percent of the parent questionnaires were returned with 37% reporting positive behavior change with no negative comments. The classroom teachers interviewed indicated behavior changes of their students after program participation.

The research study from Hawaii (Araki, Takeshita, & Kadomoto, 1989) was done over a three year period with data collected from the last two years and reported in 1989. This project's goals were to assess their Dispute Management Project, examine the nature of conflicts in schools, and determine effects of the project on the school climate, student-student, student-school, and student-community conflicts. This project used experimental and control groups in high school, junior high and elementary schools. No curriculum was taught to all students.

This project used surveys, interviews and school profile data, such as number of retentions, suspensions, and attendance, as measures. A survey was given to students, staff, parents, and administrators on school climate. Also, surveys concerning the mediation project were given to the mediators and disputants. Interviews were done with

administrators and staff.

Positive effects of mediating conflicts were shown for most problems involving misunderstandings, communication or personality differences, but not as effective for violence, vandalism and drop-out rates. For student-student conflicts, 60% of staff, 80% of mediators and 88% of the disputants indicated the mediation program was effective. The program was not viewed as effective with student-teacher conflicts, although all 12 of these disputes were mediated and agreements have held. There were no school-community disputes mediated. Qualitative data showed positive effects on the school climate according to all parties; however, profile data did not show a change in rates of retention, suspensions, etc. The most common types of disputes found are gossip/rumors, harassment, arguments, and classroom misbehavior. Other note-worthy implications were co-mediation was most effective and more communication with parents was needed.

The Idaho Program (Benenson, 1988) used a quasi-experimental design with two elementary schools as experimental and two as control groups. A peer mediation program was implemented with selected students trained as mediators and teachers given six hours of training. A conflict resolution program consisting of 10-12 hours over six weeks was taught to all the students.

Measures used were surveys, training evaluations, school data of number of conflicts reported to the principal, and

peer mediation report forms. The survey measured both destructive and constructive conflict behaviors, was pretested for validity and used three groups for comparison, one group had classroom training, one had class training and mediation training and the control group had neither. School data of conflicts were reported two weeks before pretest and after posttest. Results showed that trained students had significantly more knowledge than control group in constructive ways to handle conflicts, and mediators had even more knowledge than the just classroom group. There was no difference in number of conflicts between control and experimental groups.

Evaluations of training of mediators were very positive. Limitations noted were changes in attitudes did not lead to changes in behavior and no comparisons were made of either groups of classroom training or mediators training to investigate if they learned anything or if training was effective.

The New Mexico study (Jenkins & Smith, 1987) was done during the 1986-87 school year with 8 school districts, one Bureau of Indian Affairs school and one juvenile corrections facility. Seventeen elementary schools, five middle/junior high and one high school participated representing urban and small communities and multiracial groups, such as Native Americans, Hispanics, and Anglos. The evaluation goals were to assess the impact of a peer mediation program on students' attitudes about interpersonal conflict and ways to resolve

conflict.

In the elementary schools, 331 students (4th, 5th, and 6th graders) were selected as peer mediators, went through 12-16 hours of training and worked as pairs on the playground. Teachers of these grades taught a 19 lesson unit on conflict resolution to all students.

Measures used to evaluate this program were student scales, student observations and teacher scales, using a pretest-posttest experimental and control groups design. The student scales were developed as a 4-point Likert scale. The student observation form was completed by the teachers. The Teacher scale was completed by teachers about their approach to conflict and their observations about conflict in schools.

Results from these measures for elementary students were: student scales showed the only significant difference between the mediator and control group was the mediator group gained more on problem solving/conflict resolution subscale; middle school mediator group had significant gains on three subscales and the total scores; several teachers' observations noted more positive changes with the mediator group than the control group for elementary students and no assessment made in middle school; the teachers attitude scale indicated a more positive outlook on conflict resolution and teacher intervention declined almost 15 % and student intervention increased 10%. One of the goals of the New Mexico Program, increasing communication and conflict resolution skills, was achieved.

These five studies all had similarities and some unique features. The similarities were in some of their evaluation goals, the types of measurements, and results were all positive to some degree. These studies were all evaluating their programs for effectiveness, all looked for some change in student attitudes towards conflict management, and all assessed peer mediators' skills.

Some of the unique features were the diverse and well represented racial/cultural mix of students in the Arizona, Hawaii, and New Mexico studies. Arizona studied the effects of mediation with at-risk students and provided on-going meetings with mediators after training. Canada did not study a peer mediation program with a few selected students, but taught negotiation skills to all students and included surveying parents. Hawaii did experimental and control groups with just the peer mediation program and showed meaningful qualitative data, but no difference in number of aggressive incidents. Idaho did experimental/control groups and did three comparisons indicating that training in this study was the most positive with classroom training combined with peer mediation training compared with classroom training only or no training. New Mexico was a large statewide study that trained all students in the 4th-6th grades in conflict resolution and implemented a peer mediation program with pre/post test results and experimental/control groups (Lam,1989).



Another study done recently was by the Ohio State Department (Kaufman,1990) which formed an Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management in conjunction with the Department of Education over the years of 1990-1993. Over 30 rural, suburban, urban schools, with elementary through high school age students participated. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed, using experimental and control groups;however, random assignments were not used. Results showed that most students in the experimental groups improved their attitudes toward conflict; increased their understanding of non-violent problem solving methods, and enhanced their communication skills. Many schools had positive changes in discipline incidents and school climate (Final Report of the School Management Demonstration Project 1990-1993, p.11). This study also found that results take time to develop. A commitment to this program is not a one or two year project to be lost to other projects. It's an important tool for creating positive changes in schools and prevention of violence, and infusing conflict management into the classroom. A mediation program school wide for students and adults is ideal.

One study that looked at school to home transfer of conflict management skills was done in 1992, using a pretest-posttest single group research design, consisting of 27 students in the 4th-6th grades in central Illinois (Gentry & Beneson, 1993). A survey was developed using Likert-type responses and open-ended questions for peer mediators and

their parents. The teachers were trained and then incorporated a four week training for all students in classroom; peer mediators were selected and trained and implemented mediation on the playground for 10 weeks. The mediators also met with the advisor on a regular basis. Findings showed that children indicated a decline in frequency and intensity of conflicts with siblings, parents saw a decline in frequency of conflicts and in their need to intervene, and parents saw a significant improvement of productive talk during conflicts. Many parents suggested that workshops be held for parents and for siblings to learn more about conflict resolution.

A final review of a conflict management program is one done by Johnson & Johnson (Students as Peacemakers, 1994) of the University of Minnesota, a five year research study from 1988-1994. Seven studies were done in six different schools, involving 1st -9th grade students from suburban and urban schools. Two types of programs were used-school wide mediation and school cadre or small group of selected students for mediation. Five of the studies had control groups, with three control groups assigned randomly. Methods of measurement were: paper and pencil achievement survey about a novel, survey on steps of mediation process, mediator report forms determining types of conflicts and agreement of resolution, a conflict scenario measure in written, interview and video-taped forms, and a content analysis of the resolutions or attempted agreements. Also, spontaneous use

of negotiation and mediation process was recorded by teachers, students, and parents, such as a first grader mediating between her two kittens or a second grader mediating between her two teenager siblings or a third grader helping her mom with solutions for her mom's company's conflicts. Findings were highly positive, indicating that students learn the conflict resolution procedures, retain this knowledge, use these procedures in conflict situations, transfer this learning to home, and use problem solving skills rather than win-lose solutions. Also, academic achievement increased and adults perceived that the program is helpful and constructive. Another implication of this study was the most beneficial effect for students was teaching negotiation and mediation skills to all students from K- twelve grades is needed. This could possibly be done by establishing cooperative learning context in schools, using academic controversies to increase achievement, and establishing a peacemaker program such as this one.

The history and different of models of negotiation and mediation have all provided a basis for the newest model-peer mediation in schools. Peer mediation used the principles of mediation and conflict from the international, business, neighborhood, and family mediation models, such as the win-win solutions, stating events and feelings and following a process. The biggest challenge for peer mediation has been the need to be comprehensive enough to show effectiveness.

From these studies, we have learned some important

implications about peer mediation programs and their effectiveness. A valid evaluation of a mediation program needs experimental and control groups with pretest and posttest data to discern if growth or changes in results are due to the program or other changes, such as maturity. Random assignments are ideal, but difficult with mediation programs because of the philosophy of selection of mediators. Random assignment can be done with teaching negotiation skills to a classroom. More studies need to be done with parents and families concerning school mediation skills transferring to the home and other settings. Research studies need to also study what types of programs are most effective; mediation alone, mediation combined with negotiation or negotiation alone. More research needs to be done concerning peer mediation and negotiation skills taught with "at risk" or special education students.

This research study attempts to add to the knowledge of literature by examining the transferability of mediation skills to home.

Many of these principles are evident in the next analysis of data of the Sibley Peer Mediation Program and following discussions of implications for future improvements.

## METHODOLOGY

This research study is an attempt to investigate the impact of a peer mediation program on two levels, with students and with families. Applying the theories of conflict resolution, cooperative learning, problem solving, and family systems and considering the history and past research in this area, this study gathered both students' and families' perceptions about the peer mediation program at Sibley Elementary School.

### Setting

Sibley Elementary School is located in Albert Lea, Minnesota about 100 miles south of the Twin Cities. Albert Lea is a small city of about 20,000 people of whom 10% are Hispanic ethnicity and the balance of predominately Scandinavian origin. The Hispanic population now live in the community on a permanent basis with only a small percent living temporarily as migrant workers. Sibley School is the only elementary school of four that offers the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program to students. About 30 students are enrolled in the program who have language difficulties. One staff person in the building is Hispanic. The racial balance in the school has impact on the peer mediation program concerning some racial conflicts and so selection of peer mediators needed to represent Hispanic students. Two out of twenty three of the peer mediators are Hispanic origin.

### Overview of Sibley Peer Mediation Program

The Sibley Peer Mediation Program started in 1993 when five staff who were trained in conflict resolution and peer mediation skills formed a committee. This committee's original purpose was to establish peer mediation as a pilot program to prevent and decrease violence at school. This is still one of the goals; however, the committee and goals have expanded. The committee established this goal, planned time frames and staff responsibilities for training and implementing the peer mediation program, ordered materials, gave an overview of the program to staff and taught all 4th and 5th graders 8 lessons on conflict resolution.

The Peer Mediation Program started in the spring of 1994 with 37 students chosen as peer mediators from the 4th and 5th grades. The students filled out application forms which were selected by the committee and teachers. Selection was based on leadership skills, willingness to commit to the program and model conflict resolution skills to other students, and to make up any class work missed. A letter was sent home explaining the program and asking parental permission for their child's participation in the program.

The training program took place after school once per week for an hour for ten weeks. The training was facilitated by the coordinator and two teachers. Training topics covered were: identifying conflict, cooperation as a team, mediation process, communication skills, brainstorming and win-win

### Operational definition

"effects" of the program- measured by the survey responses of the students' levels of agreement on a 4-point Likert Scale, such as question # 5. "I try to talk out a problem instead of fighting."

"peer mediation program"- a ten hour training program completed by the fourth and fifth grade students.

### Conceptual definitions

conflict resolution -education for all students on how to settle differences and deal with interpersonal conflicts using non-violent methods.

disputant-person disagreeing or in conflict

mediation skills-methods learned in resolving conflicts, such as actively listening, restating and reflecting statements, using "I messages", brainstorming, seeking win-win solutions.

peer mediator-a trained student who helps other students resolve their conflicts by using mediation skills.

win-win solutions - agreements that both disputing parties agree to and are satisfied with the agreement. No one is a winner or loser-both win.

### Sample Selection

A sample of 23 fourth grade students trained as peer mediators and their families was used for this study. The fourth grade students were selected instead of the fifth grade students because the fourth graders had received

improved training and they could be followed the next year for further evaluation and improvement of the program. The students were not randomly selected. Twelve parents gave consent for their children to participate in the study. Eleven students responded to the surveys (one student was absent) and four of the twelve parents responded to their surveys. The sample size of the study was 12 with 92% return rate for the students and 33% rate for the parents.

#### Data Collection Methods

Two surveys were used, one for students and one for parents (Appendices A & B). Many of the questions on the survey were taken from a school mediation program evaluation kit written by Dr. Julie Lam from the University of Massachusetts. Dr. Lam had received many of these questions from other programs that implemented evaluations. Other questions were developed for this survey based on the theoretical framework or specific needs of this program. The survey included questions about: feelings concerning conflict as related to conflict theory; the students' problem solving skills; communication skills; cooperation with others; how they feel about themselves; how important school is to them; transfer of skills to home, other settings; and usefulness to them in their lives outside of peer mediation; training preparation; acceptance from other students; school climate; types of conflicts; and desire to continue as a peer mediator.



The parent survey was developed from the students' survey, a few other researchers' studies (Miller,1993; Ward,1994) and what this program was looking for. Dr. Lam did not have a parent survey included. Most of the research has been done with peer mediators and not with parents. The questions asked parents about their child's skills he or she uses in resolving conflicts; the parents' skills in resolving conflicts; their perceptions of the peer mediation program; and the transfer of skills to home. The questions covered conflict theory, problem solving and transfer of skills from school to home.

These surveys used a 4-point Likert scale and open ended questions. They were pre-tested by 4th grade teachers and other parents for validity and readability for fourth grade students.

The research of other peer mediation program evaluations clearly showed the necessity of selecting mediators who represent the race, culture and gender of the student body. The questions asking for gender and race were included in the survey for this reason.

This research proposal was presented to the Violence Prevention Committee for their input and to increase their understanding of an evaluation process. This research study would be part of a two-three year process to evaluate the peer mediation program.

The Principal gave approval for this research study to take place at Sibley School (Appendice C). The Institutional

Review Board at Augsburg College gave their approval for the research study to start on March 24, 1995.

Informed consent forms were sent to the parents of the fourth grade peer mediators. Twelve parents consented for themselves and their child to be in this study by returning signed consent forms (Appendice D). The 12 students were given their surveys at one of the after school mediation sessions at the end of the year, June, 1995, with 11 out of 12 responding. The 12 parents were mailed their surveys with four parents returning their surveys in the provided stamped envelope, at the end of the school year, June, 1995.

The following section reports the findings of the data and analyzes this data.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Findings

The student survey responses will be presented first and the parent survey responses next. Eleven out of the initial 23 peer mediators completed the survey at the end of the school year, June, 1995. The survey consisted of 28 questions with the first two about descriptive information, such as gender, age and race. The other questions required a Likert scale response, multiple choice or open ended response.

Of the eleven student respondents, six were girls and five were boys, all Caucasian, and nine were ten years old, one was nine and one was eleven years of age. There was no significant difference in responses between boys and girls.

The responses for the Likert scale use the following abbreviations: Strongly Agree (SA); Agree Some (AS); Disagree Some (DS); Strongly Disagree (SD).

The percentage is listed first and the number of student responses out of eleven are in parentheses.

	<u>SA</u>	<u>AS</u>	<u>DS</u>	<u>SD</u>
Q3.Even if other kids would think I'm weird I would try to stop a fight.	45%(5)	55%(6)		
Q4.There are better ways to solve problems than fighting.	100%(11)			
Q5.I try to talk out a problem instead of fighting.	64%(7)	27%(3)	9%(1)	
Q6.I like school and look forward to coming most days.	64%(7)	18%(2)	9%(1)	9%(1)
Q7.It's important to have good grades	73%(8)	27%(3)		
Q8.It's important to have my teachers think of me as a good student.	82%(9)	18%(2)		
Q9.It's important to have my friends think of me as a good student.	64%(7)	27%(3)		9%(1)
Q10.To help somebody with a problem, I have to know how they feel about it.	64%(7)	27%(3)		9%(1)
Q11.I'm good at helping people solve their problems.	55%(6)	45%(5)		
Q12.I have a hard time solving my problems.		27%(3)	36%4	36%4
Q13.I work well with others.	36%(4)	55%(6)		9%(1)
Q14.Most of the time I feel good about myself.	55%(6)	45%(5)		
Q15.I'm good at asking questions when I want to find out something.	64%(7)	36%(4)		
Q16.When people talk, I have a hard time listening.	9%(1)	35%(4)	9%(1)	45%5
Q17.I use "I messages" when I need to confront someone.	45%(5)	55%(6)		

Q18. Have you used any of the mediation skills at home, with friends, relatives, in the neighborhood, or other places?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>% (#)</u>	<u>% (#)</u>
64% (7)	36% (4)

If yes, where and what skills did you use?

Responses

- at an argument
- at a friend's house; used mediation skills
- home; go through all of the steps
- when I get mad at my sister we talk
- at home; all the skills of mediation
- not to fight
- I used to fight all the time with my brother. Now I use my brains and don't fight as much.

Q19. Has this experience helped you solve any of your own problems?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>82% (9)</u>	<u>18% (2)</u>

If yes, how?

Responses

- stay calm
- I know how to figure it out
- a lot of people think I'm a nicer person
- not to get so angry
- I can control a lot more of my anger
- I can think things out
- I understand some more things
- I talk about my problems
- I did what I learned in peer mediation

Q20. Do you think this experience has helped you gain more self confidence?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
<u>45% (5)</u>	<u>55% (6)</u>

If yes, how?

Responses

- knowing what to do in hard times
- I feel good about myself & mediating
- I trust myself
- I think what I am doing sometimes or what I need to do
- in math I used to wait & not do any problems, now I try to get all my work done.

No response

- I've always had confidence in myself

Q21. How many times were you able to try and mediate a problem between peers in the last year?

<u>0</u>	<u>1-2</u>	<u>3-4</u>	<u>5-6</u>	<u>7 or more</u>
	1	1	4	5

Q22. Were the students you mediated with willing to receive your help?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>Partly</u>	<u>No</u>
4	7	

Q23. How well did the training prepare you for acting as a peer mediator?

<u>Well prepared</u>	<u>Somewhat prepared</u>	<u>Not well prepared</u>
9	2	

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Q24. Since the peer mediation program started I have seen school relationships change for the better.	6		5

Q25. Did you enjoy being a Peer Mediator?	8		3
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Q26. Do you want to be a Peer Mediator next year?	9		2
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Q27. What were three conflict situations you had to deal with?

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| -friendship          | -teasing                 |
| -disagreement (3)    | -room in lockers (2)     |
| -name calling (5)    | -fighting (3) (football) |
| -pushing (2)         | -bullying                |
| -swearing (3)        | -taking away candy       |
| -hitting             | -taking away the ball    |
| -being bossed around |                          |

Q28. What suggestions do you have to improve the Peer Mediation Program?

- don't have any
- more fun
- it was very good!
- none I can think of
- don't change anything
- I don't really have any I already like the program

The following data analysis is on 4 out of 23 possible parent surveys. Twelve parents signed consent forms, and four returned their surveys.

Part I

When your child is in a conflict situation, with siblings or friends, he/she:

	Seldom	Some	Moderately	Often	Very Much
Q1.talks it out		1	2		1
Q2.ignores the problem	3		1		
Q3.blames it on others	1	1	2		
Q4.asks you to solve it	1	3			
Q5.use win/win solutions (both are happy)			2	1	
Q6.uses good communication skills		1	1	2	

When you as a parent have a conflict with another adult or child, do you:

Q7.talk it out				3	1
Q8.ignore the problem	1	3			
Q9.use win/win solutions				3	1
Q10.use good communication skills			1	3	

Part II

	Yes	Some	No	Don't Know
Q1.After your child participated in the Peer Mediation Program, did he/she handle conflicts in more positive ways?	2	2		
Q2.Has he/she gained more self confidence because of this experience?	3	1		
Q3.Has this been a positive experience for your child?	4			
Q4.Has your family used mediation skills in resolving conflicts at home?	4			

If yes, which ones?

- win/win
- talking and addressing conflict
- active listening
- feedback
- we are studying communication skills in relationships... we need to pass it on to kids more.
- between siblings and parent/child

Parent Survey Part II cont'd.

Q5. Did you attend the parent workshop on resolving conflicts in families?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
-inconvenient time		4

Q6. Do you have any suggestions or comments about the Peer Mediation Program?

-how to incorporate the techniques into family life-I think it was a beneficial program for the school setting & had a positive influence on friendships.

-written communication mailed to parents about the skills they are learning (children don't get much info home.)

-a very good program. children are not born with mediation skills and must be taught. If not at home, then in the schools. I would like to see programs in the school helping children learn values of community, moral issues-responsibility of ones actions and decisions, as so much of these areas seem not to be learned in the home or community. Keep up the good work with our children. A very worth while program.



## Discussion

The data from the student peer mediators and their parents give positive feedback on the Peer Mediation Program. The analysis of this program's effectiveness is based on six conceptual ideas: the training program, transfer of skills to home, use of conflict theory and cooperative learning, problem solving/mediation skills, and program needs.

The training program needs more concentrated training time, such as 2-4 hours during an afternoon and weekend with two hour blocks to finish the program. This would help the program start earlier in the year maybe by October, to give more implementation time for the program. A majority of students thought they were well prepared from the training, although one would like to have more fun. Another aspect of training that could be emphasized is team work and cooperation. The most difficulty perceived by the students was mediating with other students who were reluctant to work with them. This also reflects on more classroom instruction with all students in understanding the value of resolving a conflict and understanding conflict as a theory.

In analyzing the transfer of mediation skills, both students and parents commented about using these skills at home with parents, siblings, and friends. Both qualitative and quantitative data reflect this. Parents gave suggestions to enhance more family support by providing more workshops and written information mailed to families.

The parents perceived that their children increased their

self esteem; however, more students did not think this program increased their self-esteem. One person commented about already having good self esteem and in question #14, the students stated they felt good about themselves. Perhaps students already thought they had high self esteem.

Problem solving/mediation skills were reflected in several questions about communication skills and the process of mediation. The two questions that students scored lower on were the two that looked for a "disagree" answer, opposite of the other questions, (questions 12 and 16). Students may have a hard time listening and solving their problems or the questions as worded may have been confusing. Students seem to have a good knowledge base on the process. Parents reflected the same opinion.

Some of the program needs from this data are: sending home more written information about the program, increasing attention to skills used in mediation and skills to use at home; offering more workshops for families; offering more classroom activities about resolving conflicts to help all students understand and support peer mediation; improving training by using experiential games and role-playing-this makes training more fun and teaches team work and cooperative learning; offering more support time and training for peer mediators already trained this next year; giving more training on filling out mediation forms as the information was valuable, but difficult to understand or incomplete at times; and find more ways to assess parents and receive their

feedback as it is a valuable tool for improving the program.

Six girls and five boys responded to the surveys with no significant difference according to gender.

The data from the students and parents were positive with helpful suggestions for the program. Data from this study and the informal data from the training program will give direction for program improvement and for social work practice. The next chapters will discuss these implications and limitations of this research.

## IMPLICATIONS for SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

This research study has implications for social work practice from a micro to macro level. On a micro level, social workers can be mediators between students, clients, family members or colleagues. For school social workers, working with students who need help with their behavior and self esteem, with controlling their anger, with learning social skills and conflict resolution skills is a common job responsibility. Teaching students negotiation and mediation skills is a way to accomplish this and fits into social work framework of empowerment and self-determination.

Social workers are conceptualized in society as mediators because of the similarities of the two fields of social work and mediation (Parsons,1991). Both require proficient communication skills such as reflective listening skills, questioning and reframing statements and expression of feelings.

For school social workers, mediation is congruent with social work goals. Mediation programs reach many students and families building skills in proactive ways. These skills are not only good for mediation but also are life skills for students as future citizens and decision makers of the world. Mediation also serves as a referral system for students needing more intensive help with behavior and social concerns (Moriarty & McDonald,1991). Conflict resolution programs that encourage perspective taking, negotiation skills and anger

management are important alternatives for preventing violence in schools (Alexander, Jr. & Curtis, 1995; Astor, 1995).

School social workers serve as the link between schools and families, using many theoretical frameworks and interventions. Social workers understand families as complex, unique systems with all their many interactions and stressors. Parents and families involved in a child's education are a determining factor in successful academic achievement. For school social workers, schools are looked at as a community of families in which social workers can use many different roles, such as advocate, broker, enabler, and mediator (Constable & Walberg).

Social work and mediation on a macro level look at challenges on the community, state, and world plane. People knowing mediation skills will enhance positive relationships between neighbors, state and world leaders and countries. Understanding that constructive conflict is healthy and encourages people to celebrate differences is a goal of social workers. Promoting peace is social work's heritage from Jane Addams, the founding "mother" of social work.

This research study has impacted my social work practice as a school social worker in three ways. The study has helped me learn more about training and implementing conflict resolution programs. For example, Johnson & Johnson's Peacemakers study (1994) gave me the idea of using videotaping for training for the mediation process. I have many resources to turn to for assistance, such as NAME's

resources and the many studies for survey ideas. It has helped me understand the importance of evaluation and research. Many programs are started and exist without knowing if they are effective or worthwhile. This study also reaffirmed my personal belief in peace and justice for all people. Helping children learn conflict resolution skills is a good place to start to achieve peace and justice.

Another impact from this study for my job as a school social worker was the development of three packets of materials and resources to use at Sibley School. These packets are divided into three areas; training and implementation, evaluation, and families and conflict resolution.

In the training and implementation packet, I organized all the forms, letters, flyers, records of the peer mediators, committee agendas and minutes, and newsletters that we have generated at Sibley for the past two years. This packet will be a historical record for understanding how the program started and a resource in implementing the program.

The second packet is a collection of evaluation forms and surveys and information that may be useful for other schools in setting up an evaluation component for a mediation program. As more surveys are developed at Sibley, such as one for disputants, they will be added to this packet.

The third packet is a collection of handouts that will be used at the orientation meeting for peer mediators and their parents, materials to be used for parent workshops, and ideas for more parent involvement.

These packets are "works in progress" and directly relate to the goals as stated in the Conclusion Chapter for expanding this research study.

## LIMITATIONS

This study gave some valuable insight and suggestions for improving the Peer Mediation Program, such as, evaluating the impact of a mediation program with "at-risk" students and using journals for students to write their ideas and reflections of the program. It also had several limitations concerning the research design, sample size and population, and time span of the study.

The research design was limited due to time and resources. An experimental design using control groups and pre-test and post-test surveys might give more information on which variables lead to which outcomes. A few studies have been able to randomly assign students in classrooms to experimental and control groups; however, this is difficult if assessing a specific group such as peer mediators. Using different types of measurement tools, such as, surveys, observations, interviews, and data, helps triangulate results. Using multiple measurement tools gives many perspectives in different ways to enrich the meaning and depth of data. Some data and concepts would not always be apparent using just quantitative or just qualitative data.

The sample size was very small for both students and parents and the response rate was low for the parents. This is an inherent problem in small schools; however, a larger sample size could be acquired by assessing students and parents from several schools in a district. The sample



population needs to be enlarged to assessing staff in schools and student disputants to discern a greater effect on the whole school. Timing is important in gaining enough samples. The parent surveys were mailed at the end of the school year which may account for low return rates. Giving surveys at a meeting instead of mailing may help return rates.

The sample population was biased in that only Caucasian students and parents responded. It would be important to include students and families with Hispanic origins.

A larger sample size may have shown differences in responses by gender, as some studies have reported this difference.

The survey questions could be matched even more to theoretical framework and investigate new variables such as self esteem, school attitude, academic achievement and cooperative learning.

The time frame of this study was very short. A longitudinal study over a three year span would give more data and depth for a developing program to gain reliability and validity. The training and implementation of the program would hopefully improve over years to give the most beneficial experience in learning conflict resolution skills.

Establishing a baseline to measure violent incidents at the school is needed. Violent incidents will need to be defined and agreed upon by all staff and then measured before and after a program is implemented.

## CONCLUSIONS

Further research of the Sibley Peer Mediation Program is needed for a longer period of time to develop stability and support from the school community. A three year study would be interesting. The study could also be expanded to other schools within the district.

Some goals for expanding a research study for this program would be:

1. Start the Peer Mediation Program earlier in the year by concentrating the training time into afternoon/weekend times and including more measurement tools on pretest/posttest basis.

2. Plan a refresher course with pretest measures with fifth graders, ongoing bi-weekly support meetings for mediators on duty, and on-going monthly support/training meetings for all mediators.

3. Infuse mediation and negotiation skills into the curriculum(health?) for all students, K-5th grades. Ask interested teachers to pilot this.

4. Encourage parents, other staff, playground supervisors, high school and junior high school peer mediators to help with program implementation, such as training and support meetings.

5. Involve parents in the program, offer more workshops, and send more information home to families on conflict resolution, and include in evaluations. Organize an

orientation meeting for new peer mediators and parents and support meetings for families on a quarterly basis. Use this forum for evaluation purposes plus education and support.

6. Survey peer mediators, disputants, staff and parents on pre/post test and use observations, interviews, and data plus surveys to evaluate.

7. Teach negotiation skills to at-risk students.

8. Investigate the possibility with community members and other social workers about a community mediation center.

9. Plan with the Violence Prevention Committee on the building and district level ways to institutionalize conflict resolution programs and assess other interventions for preventing violence.

The school social worker's role can be the coordinator of a school's conflict resolution program or serve on the committee in implementing a program with educational staff. As other staff support the program and take on more responsibility for educating the students in these skills, a school social worker can work more with families.

By implementing programs like the peer mediation program, social work practice will impact individuals and society at large. An important concept to keep in mind is not to eliminate all conflict, but to appreciate and nurture constructive conflict and manage destructive conflict in non

violent ways. Social workers can remember Lawrence Shulman's (1993, p. 251) quote concerning relationships, "conflict and caring go hand in hand."

As we strive to achieve peace and justice in this world, we need to care enough about the other person to value their differences and perspectives- to work towards "win/win" solutions for all. Then we will know the joy of being a peacemaker.

"Would that I could be the peacemaker in your soul, that I might turn the discord and the rivalry of your elements into oneness and melody. But how shall I, unless you yourselves be also the peacemakers..."

Kahlil Gibran

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**SIBLEY SCHOOL PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM  
STUDENT SURVEY**

Dear Student,

We would like you to answer a few questions about yourself, so we can study the usefulness of the peer mediation program. The results are private and confidential. There are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will not affect how well you do in the peer mediation program. You may choose to not answer some questions if you are uncomfortable in answering them. You will be asked to fill out this survey now and at the end of April. You may discuss this survey with your parents at any time.

Your help is greatly appreciated!

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My parents have signed the consent form and have returned it, giving me permission to participate in this study. I agree to participate in this study, too. I have asked questions and received answers if needed.

Student's  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## STUDENT SURVEY

The first two questions are asked so we can describe the Peer Mediators at Sibley. It is important that peer mediators represent the makeup of their classmates, such as numbers of boys or girls, age, and race.

Please circle (or fill in) the answer that best describes you.

1. I am : 1. Female 2. Male      Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which one of these groups best describes you?
1. African-American
  2. Asian
  3. Caucasian
  4. Latino/Latina
  5. Native American
  6. Other

	Strongly Agree	Agree Some	Disagree Some	Strongly Disagree
3. Even if other kids would think I'm weird I would try to stop a fight.	1	2	3	4
4. There are better ways to solve problems than fighting.	1	2	3	4
5. I try to talk out a problem instead of fighting.	1	2	3	4
6. I like school and look forward to coming most days.	1	2	3	4
7. It's important to have good grades	1	2	3	4
8. It's important to have my teachers think of me as a good student.	1	2	3	4
9. It's important to have my friends think of me as a good student.	1	2	3	4

	Strongly Agree	Agree Some	Disagree Some	Strongly Disagree
10. To help somebody with a problem I have to know how they feel about it.	1	2	3	4
11. I'm good at helping people solve their problems.	1	2	3	4
12. I have a hard time solving my problems.	1	2	3	4
13. I work well with others.	1	2	3	4
14. Most of the time I feel good about myself.	1	2	3	4
15. I'm good at asking questions when I want to find out something.	1	2	3	4
16. When people talk, I have a hard time listening.	1	2	3	4
17. I use "I messages" when I need to confront someone.	1	2	3	4

18. Have you used any of the mediation skills at home, with friends, relatives, in the neighborhood, or other places? a) yes \_\_\_ b) no \_\_\_  
If yes, where and what skills did you use?

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19. Has this experience helped you solve any of your own problems?  
a) yes \_\_\_ b) no \_\_\_ If yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_

---

20. Do you think this experience has helped you gain more self confidence?

a) yes \_\_\_ b) no \_\_\_ If yes, how? \_\_\_\_\_

---

21. How many times were you able to try and mediate a problem between peers in the last year? (circle one)  
a) 0 b) 1-2 c) 3-4 d) 5-6 e) 7 or more

22. Were the students you mediated with willing to receive your help?  
a) yes \_\_\_ b) partly \_\_\_ c) no \_\_\_

23. How well did the training prepare you for acting as a peer mediator?  
\_\_\_ a) I was very well prepared  
\_\_\_ b) I was somewhat prepared  
\_\_\_ c) I was not well prepared

24. Since the peer mediation program started I have seen school relationships, student to student, and student to teacher, change for the better:  
\_\_\_ a) yes  
\_\_\_ b) no  
\_\_\_ c) don't know

25. Did you enjoy being a Peer Mediator? a) yes \_\_\_ b) no \_\_\_  
c) don't know \_\_\_

26. Do you want to be a Peer Mediator next year? a) yes \_\_\_ b) no \_\_\_  
c) don't know \_\_\_

27. What were three conflict situations you had to deal with?

A.

B.

C.

28. What suggestions do you have to improve the Peer Mediation Program?

Some of the above questions were taken from the booklet School Mediation Program Evaluation published by NAME and written by Julie A. Lam, Ph. D.



# SIBLEY SCHOOL PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM

## PARENT SURVEY

Dear Parent:

The following survey is private and confidential. The results will be reported only as totals and averages except the comments, which will be anonymous. For the questions below there are no right or wrong answers. You may choose not to answer some questions if you do not feel comfortable answering them. THIS IS NOT A TEST! You may share your answers with your Peer Mediator, as we encourage mediators to talk about ways to resolve conflicts within their families. Your help is greatly appreciated!

### Part 1

Please circle the answer that best describes your family situation.

**When your child is in a conflict situation, with siblings or friends, he/she:**  
Seldom    Some    Moderately    Often    Very much

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. talks it out  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. ignores the problem.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. blames it on others.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. asks you to solve it .                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. use "win/win" solutions.<br>(both are happy with solutions) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. uses good communication skills.                             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**When you as a parent have a conflict with another adult or child, do you:**

- |                                    |   |   |   |   |   |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. talk it out.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. ignore the problem              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. use win/win solutions           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. use good communication skills. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## Part 2

1. After your child participated in the Peer Mediation Program, did he/she handle conflicts in more positive ways? a) yes\_\_\_ b) some\_\_\_ c)no\_\_\_  
d) don't know \_\_\_\_\_
2. Has he/she gained more self confidence because of this experience?  
a) yes\_\_\_\_\_ b) some\_\_\_ c) no\_\_\_\_\_ d) don't know\_\_\_\_\_
3. Has this been a positive experience for your child?  
a) yes\_\_\_\_\_ b) somewhat\_\_\_\_\_ c) no\_\_\_\_\_ d) don't know\_\_\_\_\_
4. Has your family used mediation skills in resolving conflicts at home?  
a) yes\_\_\_\_\_ b) somewhat\_\_\_\_\_ c) no\_\_\_\_\_ d) don't know\_\_\_\_\_

If yes, which ones? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Did you attend the parent workshop on resolving conflicts in families?  
a) yes\_\_\_\_\_ b) no\_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what did you learn or try at home?

6. Do you have any suggestions or comments about the Peer Mediation Program?

Some of the above questions were taken from the booklet School Mediation Program Evaluation published by NAME and written by Julie A. Lam, Ph.D.

# **Evaluation of Effects of a Peer Mediation Program with Students and Families**

## **Consent Form**

You are invited to be in a research study regarding the evaluation of the Sibley Elementary Peer Mediation Program for students and families. This study is being conducted by Dawn Berg for her Masters in Social Work thesis at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Mn. You were selected as a possible participant because your child is a Sibley Peer Mediator. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

### **Background Information :**

The purpose of this study is to help evaluate what the effects the Sibley Peer Mediation Program has on students and families. This information will be helpful in improving the Peer Mediation Program.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a survey about ten weeks after the student mediators have implemented their peer mediation program. This consent form also asks your permission for your child to participate in a survey concerning their demonstration and knowledge of peer mediation skills about ten weeks into the program. The mediators will complete their surveys and consent forms in school. I have enclosed a sample form for your information.

Please complete this consent form and return in the enclosed envelope to Sibley Elementary School. The survey will be mailed to you about the middle of April. This study has been approved by the Sibley Elementary Principal and the Institutional Review Board of Augsburg College (IRB approval number 94-42-3).

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

There are no apparent risks or direct benefits for participating in the study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that we might publish or submit to Sibley Elementary, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file. The records for this research will only be accessible to the investigator, Dawn Berg. The records will be destroyed when her thesis is completed.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not in any way affect your relationship with Sibley Elementary School or Augsburg College. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**Contacts and questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Dawn Berg. If you have any questions, you may contact her at Sibley Elementary School at 377-5884. You may also contact her thesis advisor: Tony Bibus at (612) 330-1746- Augsburg College, Social Work Department , 2211 Riverside Ave., Minneapolis, Mn. 55454.

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

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and received answers if needed. I consent to participate in this study and to allow my child to participate in this study. My child agrees to participate.

Parent's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# ALBERT LEA AREA SCHOOLS

## INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 241

Albert Lea - Clarks Grove - Hayward - Hollandale - Manchester - Twin Lakes  
109 West Avenue - Albert Lea, Minnesota 56007-2477 - (507-377-5800)

January 16, 1995

IRB Committee  
Augsburg College  
731 21st Avenue South  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55454

Dear Augsburg IRB Committee:

The staff at Sibley Elementary School of I.S.D. #241 have agreed to participate in the research study conducted by Dawn Berg, for her Masters of Social Work Thesis. The purpose of the research has been reviewed and approved. An evaluation of our Peer Mediation program will be beneficial for Sibley as we continually seek to improve our service to students.

Sincerely,



David M. Prescott, Ph.D.  
Interim Superintendent  
and Sibley Principal

DMP:ls

"GOOD SCHOOLS FOR THE GOOD LIFE"

