Perspectives of Primary School Peer Mediators on Their Mediation Practices

Tarkan Kacmaz[*]

Abstract

Problem statement: The effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs was reported by various researchers worldwide. A great majority of research studies deal with the overall effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs and the effectiveness of the peer mediation process in actual conflicts. However, little attention was paid to exploring the problems and concerns of peer mediators who attempt to facilitate the negotiation of disputants' conflicts. Therefore, the current study deals with conflict resolution and peer mediation training and procedures from the mediators' perspectives.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study was to analyze the experiences of primary school peer mediator students through their perspectives, while mediating the interpersonal conflicts of fourth- and fifth-year primary school students.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data. A total of 60 students were interviewed and the data collected were analyzed through content analysis. The results were reported both as quantitative (frequency and percentage) analysis and actual student statements.

Findings and results: The results of the study indicated that peer mediators were, indeed, happy about the mediation process and felt special for helping their friends make peace. Mediator students stated that the mediation process improved their self-esteem and self-confidence, helped develop their conflict resolution and communication skills, enabled them to understand other students and the reasons underlying fights, reduced

[*] Dr. Tarkan Kacmaz, Dokuz Eylul University, Conflict Resolution Research Center, Izmir-TURKEY, tarkan.kacmaz@deu.edu.tr.

interpersonal conflicts and fights, and improved their relationships with their peers. Mediator students used the skills they acquired outside the school context as well. Nevertheless, a small number of students reported that some of the disputing students showed resistance, misconstrued and disparaged the mediation process, and would not listen to each other, thus causing the mediator students feel helpless.

Conclusions and recommendations: Conflict resolution and peer mediation training and skills directly affect and develop students' constructive conflict resolution skills, empathetic skills, self-expression skills, and understanding skills. Hence, the actual and direct improvement is observed in students' positive life skills. As the students develop more positive life skills, they naturally resort less to negative and destructive conflict resolution strategies and destructive anger management methods. Furthermore, promoting a peer mediation model could contribute greatly to the personal development of students and increase instruction time. Thus, on one hand, student violence will decrease, and, on the other hand, students will acquire essential life skills and improve academically.

Keywords: Peer mediation, conflict resolution, peace education, school discipline

Although interpersonal conflicts are natural and unavoidable in a school context, when mismanaged, they may lead to disruption and harm, and waste valuable instructional, administrative, and learning time and effort (Bickmore, 2002). Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are widely used to manage and transform interpersonal conflicts. The most widely accepted conflict resolution approach in schools today is peer mediation which is based on a structured process consisting of specific steps in which an unbiased third party (the mediator) assists two or more disputing students to negotiate and reach a peaceful and integrative resolution to their conflicts (Daunic, Smith, Robinson, Miller, & Landry, 2000; Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, & Magnuson, 1995; Moriarty & McDonald, 1991; Tolson & McDonald, 1992). Assistance is provided by trained peers who facilitate the resolution of interpersonal conflicts brought to a neutral table, where disputing students are helped to examine all aspects of the conflict, to recommend changes and compromises, and to arrive at a mutually agreed upon integrative and constructive solutions (Moriarty & McDonald, 1991; Tolson & McDonald, 1992). Peer mediation training encourages students to rethink the use of violence as a conflict resolution tool and to analyze interpersonal conflicts critically. Mediating their friends' conflicts requires identifying sources of conflict and discussing them in a systematic manner that helps them realize their own power to resolve conflicts and take ownership of their conflicts, to take an active role in their resolution, and to develop perspective-taking skills (Williamson, Warner, Sanders, & Knepper, 1999).

Training students as peer mediators has some positive outcomes for the general school population, but Van Slyck and Stem (1991) claim that the students who gain

the most from these conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are the peer mediators themselves (cited in Humphries, 1999). Teaching students how to negotiate their own conflicts and how to mediate schoolmates' conflicts empowers them to regulate their own behavior (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Maxwell, 1989). The mediation process entails participatory decision making, and teaching communication, listening, and problem-solving skills that foster self-regulation and self-empowerment (Maxwell, 1989), which are central and significant hallmarks of cognitive and social development (Johnson & Johnson, 2004, Johnson et al., 1995). Furthermore, the peer mediation process also improves mediator students' self esteem and self respect (Maxwell, 1989; Messing, 1993; Thompson, 1996), and results in enhanced leadership skills, increased peer status, and academic improvement (Lane & McWhirter, 1992). Another positive outcome of peer mediation training is the transfer of conflict resolution skills into other settings, such as the family and neighborhood. This positive transfer also has significant potential to promote better citizenship by encouraging students to become proactive problem solvers and responsible citizens (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Moriarty & McDonald, 1991; Williamson et al., 1999). The effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs was reported by various researchers worldwide (Bell, Coleman, Anderson, & Whelan, 2000; Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss, 2007; Johnson & Johnson 2001; Johnson, Johnson, Mitchell, Cotton, Harris, & Louison, 1996; Smith, Daunic, Miller, & Robinson, 2002). In addition to these research studies, Burrell, Zirbell, and Allen's (2003) meta-analysis of twenty-three peer mediation studies revealed that, of the 4327 mediations, 4028 ended in agreement (93%), which indicates the success of mediation programs in the schools.

A great majority of research studies deal with the overall effectiveness of conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs and the effectiveness of peer mediation process in actual conflicts. However, little attention was paid to explore the problems and concerns of peer mediators who attempt to facilitate the negotiation of disputants' conflicts (Humphries, 1999). Therefore, the current study deals with conflict resolution and peer mediation training and procedures from the mediators' perspectives. The way peer mediation is perceived will be analyzed based on the mediator students' statements. Student statements will be analyzed to reveal how peer mediators felt when they became mediators, the negative and positive aspects of becoming a mediator, how becoming a mediator affected their relationships with their friends, changes they observed in their own behavior, and finally, the effects of conflict resolution and peer mediation training and implementation of peer mediation process in their schools.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted in two primary schools located in Buca-Izmir, Turkey. The schools where the study was conducted serve students at lower socio-economic

levels. The majority of the students come from impoverished families that have migrated from various parts of Turkey. A total of 520 students from 12 classrooms received Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation (CRPM) training for two hours a week, for 16 weeks. Following the training, 12 peer mediator students were selected from each classroom by their friends, totaling 144 students. The selected students served as peer mediators in teams of two, for two weeks each. Upon completion of their terms, students were interviewed to elicit their perceptions of their role as peer mediators and to discuss their experiences using the steps of the mediation procedure. Of the 144 mediator students, a total of 60 (34 females and 26 males; 30 fourth-grade, typically 10-year-olds, and 30 fifth-grade, typically 11-year-olds) peer mediator students were interviewed using a semi-structured interview technique. In particular, students who mediated multiple conflicts were interviewed in order to obtain more realistic data regarding the questions asked.

Procedures

The Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation (CRPM) training program was developed by the research team, prior to conducting the research, based on current literature in the field, including articles by Bodine, Crawford, and Schrumpf (2002a), (2002b), Cohen (1995), Girard and Koch (1996), Johnson and Johnson (1995a), Johnson and Johnson (1995b), Schrumpf, Crawford, and Bodine (1997a), Schrumpf, Crawford, and Bodine (1997b), Simpson (1998), and Teolis (1998). The 31-hour training program covered four basic skills: Understanding the nature of interpersonal conflicts (nine hours), communication skills (four hours), anger management skills (six hours), and interpersonal conflict resolution skills (12 hours).

The CRPM training program was presented to the experimental group during the 2006-2007 academic year. The training sessions were held in the schools during school hours. The training involved individual learning, whole-class teaching, and pair-work and group-work activities. Scenarios were provided and role-play activities were carried out frequently. By the end of the fall semester of the 2006-2007 academic year, the training was completed and the peer-mediation model was commenced. The process was observed during the spring semester and the following academic year. The model used in this study for selecting peer mediators was a synthesis of 'total student body' and 'cadre' approaches. The basis for this decision was ensuring that all students became familiar with how peer mediation worked. After all the students in the school were given CRPM training, a small number of students were selected by their class-mates to serve as peer mediators. In each class, 12 peer mediators were appointed with ideally equal gender distribution where possible. After the peer mediators were selected, the peer-mediation process commenced. In teams of two, for two weeks each, peer mediators mediated their friends' conflicts.

Assessment Procedures

Semi-structured interview forms were used as a data collection instrument. The interview questions on the form aimed to elicit what mediator students thought and how they felt about their role as mediators, and to discuss what they experienced

during the mediation. Before the actual interviews were held, five students were interviewed to test the interview form and to make sure the students were able to understand and answer the questions. The questions were then revised accordingly and interviews were held. The collected data were transcribed into text.

Analysis of Data

Data collected through semi-structured interviews were analysed through content analysis. A content analysis based on the model of Johnson et al was performed (1996). First, all responses to questions on the semi-structured interview form were read in order to gain an orientation to their contents. Second, the responses provided by 60 peer mediators were categorized. Third, related categories were combined into more general categories. Fourth, once the categories were determined, the rater reread each form and classified the responses into the appropriate categories. Student responses were coded into predetermined categories by the researcher. After the data in each category were coded, frequency and percentage statistics for the categories were computed based on gender. Furthermore, student statements regarding each category were also provided as text. Before the final coding, intra-rater reliability was computed (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Responses were coded twice by the researchers in the project team, one week apart. The results of both codings indicated 90.90 % reliability.

Results

Mediator Students' Feelings on Being Selected as Mediators

Student statements related to this issue were grouped into five categories, such as: "happiness," "excitement," "elation," "feeling different," and "self-respect". Among these feelings, the prominent ones were "elation" (females 38%, males 44%) and "happiness" (females 33%, males 29%) expectedly. "Self-respect" (females 16%, males 17%) was another feeling that was mentioned:

> *Elation: I was really elated, I felt elated*
>
> *Happiness: I was happy, I felt good*
>
> *Self-respect: I felt proud to help solve others' problems / I was proud of myself / I felt like a celebrity.*

When the student statements for this category were analyzed, self-respect and self-confidence and more specifically, a personal sense of empowerment and competence to guide others were elicited. Being accepted and selected as mediators improved the mediator students' self-perception. Mediator students often emphasized their sense of pride.

Positive Aspects of Being a Medaitor

Student statements regarding this issue were grouped into eight categories: "gaining new knowledge and skills," "benevolence," "being chosen," "reconciling /

making peace," "personal improvement," "understanding others better," "preventing and minimizing conflicts," and "socialization." As a matter of fact, the categories of "reconciling/making peace" (females 54% and males 46%), and "benevolence" (females 14% and males 29%) can be considered together, as the student statements included in these categories emphasized similar points:

> *Benevolence: You do good deeds when you help people reconcile / you feel very happy when you stop a fight / I am very happy that I help people make peace / I felt very happy because I solved the disputants' conflict.*

> *Reconciling / Making peace: Solving my friends' problems conflicts / to reconcile the disputants who aren't talking to each other / Help people reconcile /Fix two people's relationship / To eliminate the conflicts between my friends / When I reconcile my friends' conflicts they like me more.*

"Becoming more prosocial," "notion of youth helping youth," "positive transfer of problem solving abilities and social responsibility" and "consideration of others" were the emerging themes. Similarly, "personal improvement" (females 5% and males 11%), "understanding others better" (females 8%) and "gaining new knowledge and skills" (males 6%) also testify to the positive impact mediation has on students:

> *Personal Improvement: I used to fight a lot, now I don't fight / During the process, I improved myself.*

> *Understanding others better: To empathize / To understand my friends better / I understand my friends' feelings, demands and all better.*

> *Gaining new knowledge and skills: You learn new things. This helps you when other conflicts arise.*

The content analysis of student statements brings forward themes such as "personal sense of empowerment," "proactive problem solvers," "consideration of others," "to understand each other better." Additionally, "socialization" (females 14%) is another prevalent category (*I made new friends / I have more friends now*). Mediator students mentioned that helping the disputants make peace and reach an agreement also helped them improve their own relationships.

Negative Aspects of Being a Mediator

Student statements for this item were grouped into eight categories: "none," "misunderstanding," "resistance to mediation," "helplessness," "being humiliated," "communication problems," "missing classes," and "negative attitude." Fourteen percent of the females and 32% of the males stated that there were no negative aspects to being a mediator. However, many other students named several negative aspects. The two most frequently stated negative aspects were "resistance to mediation" (females 22% and males 5%) and "communication problems" (females 19%; males 14%):

> *Resistance to mediation: They say they won't come to the mediation sessions. They hit me / They don't tell me their problems / Sometimes they don't want to make up.*

Communication Problems: Their not listening to me while I try to mediate / their not understanding me when they come to the mediation / The students' answers being unclear / The disputants who are in conflict don't answer right

Student statements in these two categories seemed to display a sort of cause-effect relationship. Disputants' refusal to attend mediation sessions, and, at times, being rude to the mediators, so as to avoid mediation, seemed to present a major problem. Similarly, two other categories that stood out as negative aspects were "helplessness" (females 16% and males 14%) and "being humiliated" (females %8 and males 23%):

Helplessness: I couldn't solve some of the problems by myself, then I felt sad / When I couldn't find a way to solve the problems I got angry / If I can't solve the conflicts, they'll start having them again

Being humiliated: They make fun of me / They tell me that I can't be a mediator / They pretend to fight and try to humiliate me / They tell me not to be a mediator

When mediation failed to yield peace and agreement, mediators had problems with their own self-perception. In particular, when the disputants were not able to reach an agreement and the conflict persisted, the mediators had a tendency to hold themselves responsible and suffer from helplessness. Another negative aspect of this dynamic was seen when some students condescended to and humiliated the mediators, which made them feel bad because their self-perception was threatened.

Effects of Being a Mediator on Mediator Students' Relationships

Student statements regarding this issue were grouped into six categories: "no effect," "positive effect," "negative effect," "relationship problems," "personal improvement," and "improving relationships." Approximately 19% of the females and 11% of the males stated that being a mediator did not have any effect whatsoever on their relationships with their friends. Other students named various kinds of effects, the most common being "positive effects." Mediator students (females 26% and males 25%) claimed that being a mediator had "positive effects" on their friendships:

Positive effect: They were all happy that I was doing this / They like me more / They like me more because I am helping them / When I became a mediator my friends showed more interest in me / They all congratulated me.

In this category, students mostly talked about the positive attitude toward them on the part of their close friends. Similarly, "improving relationships" (females 13% and males 18%) was another category along the same lines:

Improving relationships: Friends whose problems I solved started to hang out with me / They were proud of me/ It made the relations with my friends better / They wanted to play with me more / It affected my relations with my friends in a good way / We are more supportive of each other.

This category included statements that contained subtle hints about how their relationships were affected positively by their performance in mediation process. Mediator students believed that helping the disputants resolve their conflicts improved their friendships and relationships with the disputants. Similarly, at least a few students claimed that being a mediator fostered their "personal improvement" (females 6% and males 4%). Although these students chose to remain silent in the past, they now started to speak up for their rights. Hence, they became more assertive, which had a positive influence on their developing better social skills.

Despite all these positive statements, a large number of students claimed that being a mediator had some negative effects on their relationships (23% of the females and 36% of the males):

Negative effect: We started to have some problems / There were some misunderstandings / They were jealous of me / Some of them made fun of me / Some of my friends hit me and made bad jokes like "you are a mediator, you can't hit me back" / some said they ended up being wrong in the mediation and stopped talking to me.

The prevalent theme in this category was "jealousy" and "mocking" which resulted in a negative attitude toward the mediators. Similarly, some students (females 13% and males 7%) indicated that they were having some relationship problems. They claimed that they were unable to spend as much time with their close friends and that their friends thought that being selected as a mediator provided some privileges to the mediator students, which had adverse effects on their friendships.

Behavioral Changes after Becoming a Mediator

Student statements about this issue were grouped into seven categories: "no change," "empathetic improvement," "improvement in the problem solving ability," "transferring the problem solving skills outside school," "positive change in behavior," "socialization," and "personal improvement." Very few students (two females and one male) stated that there had been no change in their behavior. However, the rest provided very encouraging responses. 37% of the females and 59% of the males emphasized the positive changes in their behavior:

Positive change in behavior: I've mended my ways / After I became a mediator I fixed my bad behavior / I don't hit people anymore / I don't yell at my friends anymore / I don't swear and make bad jokes anymore / I tried not to have conflicts with anyone / I've learnt to apologize / After I became mediator I got angry less often / I understood what a good thing it was to make peace / I used to fight with my friends before, but now I don't / I don't swear anymore and I get along with my friends / I have changed a lot. I was rude. Now, I am a lot better. I don't fight / I fought a lot back then. Now I do so less.

The recurrent theme in their statements was a positive transformation or change from a negative reality. Students admitted that they used to be more aggressive, swear a lot, lose their temper more often, and fight much more, but that they did not anymore. These statements that indicate transformation are quite noteworthy. Especially, the fact that the students themselves were aware of these changes and talked about them is indicative of this transformation and a personal development in self empowering, self regulation, self management, self esteem, and self respect. It is also worth noting that these statements were made by more males than females, especially in a primarily low-SES elementary school. On the other hand, 20% of the females emphasized "personal improvement," while no males mentioned it. Female mediators stated that they were now more informed about conflict resolution, were able to manage their anger better, and were more assertive. Similarly, four females and one male stressed improvement in empathetic skills. Students stated that they became better listeners and were more empathetic, and therefore, managed their problems better. Apart from these statements, two emerging themes in the statements of both females and males were "improvement in problem solving abilities" (females 20% and males 28%) and "transferring problem solving skills outside school" (females 7% and males 6%):

> *Improvement in problem solving ability: I express myself not by fighting, but by talking / I can solve my problems with my friends / I stop fights. I send them to a mediator / I started to help people make peace / I can respond to conflicts better.*

> *Transferring the problem solving skills outside school: I use the techniques that I have also learned at home / I solved the conflicts of the people in my neighborhood / My behavior towards others is more positive.*

Students stated that they were better able to manage their own and their friends' conflicts. Similarly, they also stated that they were able to use these skills not only in school, but also outside the school context, at home and in their neighborhoods.

Effects of CRPM Program on the School

Student statements for this item were grouped into five main categories: "effects on student conflicts," "effects on the student behavior," "effects on the relationship among students," "effects on the communication skills of the students," and "effects on the students' conflict resolution skills." Student statements revealed that the most significant effect of the CRPM program was on student conflicts (females 57% and males 83%):

> *Effects on student conflicts: The conflicts among students decreased / Number of conflicting students in the school decreased / Fights among students decreased / Students started not getting into fights / Students try not to fight / Students don't use foul language anymore.*

Mediator students stated that there was a sharp decrease in conflicts and fights among students, which provides evidence in support of the program. On the other hand, two other categories emphasized especially by the female students are "effects

on the students' conflict resolution skills" (females 17% and males 4%) and "effects on the relationship among students" (females 20% and males 8%):

> *Effects on the students' conflict resolution skills: Students started to solve their conflicts by understanding and listening to each other / They can easily solve their problems / When they have a conflict they can solve it peacefully without fighting / They started to make peace.*

> *Effects on the relationship among students: They are more respectful / They started to act in a constructive and peaceful manner / School grounds became more friendly / They became more sincere / Students don't stop talking to each other as much.*

Mediator students said they observed that their peers were able to manage their conflicts in a peaceful manner and make peace, and resolve their conflicts by trying to understand and listen to each other. These statements are quite significant. Similarly, they also emphasized that there was a noticeable change in the relationships in that students respected each other more, were friendlier and more sincere. Therefore, these two categories can be considered as related to each other in a cause-effect paradigm.

Discussion

This study analyzed the effects of a conflict resolution and peer mediation program implemented in two elementary schools (fourth- and fifth-year students) through the peer mediator students' perspectives. Based on their statements, it is safe to assume that the peer mediation approach was well embraced by the students. Mediator students provided noteworthy responses when asked how they felt after becoming a mediator. Among the feelings they listed, happiness, excitement, elation, and feeling different were predominant among both the female and the male mediator students. Mediator students also laid emphasis on moral values, in particular, benevolence and smoothing things over between their friends. Helping their friends reconcile their conflicts was very gratifying. Many of the female and male mediators expressed their delight at being able to assist their disputing friends in resolving their conflicts which they did dutifully, considering it a good deed.

Both the female and the male mediator students stated that they felt good, were happy, pleased, and elated when their friends made peace with their help. Similarly, mediator students took pride in and felt honored by partaking in the resolution of their friends' conflicts and helping them make peace. Based on the student statements, peer mediation seems to be an effective approach in developing students' self-esteem. Similar results were reported by other researchers in the field (Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Maxwell, 1989; Messing, 1993; Thompson, 1996) who argued that peer mediation is an important tool in the fostering of self esteem for both mediators and disputants.

Mediator students also emphasized the effects of peer mediation on their personal development. They claimed to have gone through a transformation after they became mediators. There were significant changes in their behavior prior to and following the peer mediation training and serving as mediators. They used to get involved in fights, hit their friends, and were ill-tempered, whereas now they did not fight or hit their friends and managed their anger better. They also expressed that they gained new skills through the process and used them in resolving their friends' conflicts and helping them make peace. A notable positive transformation was observed in all the students who received training. Mediator students observed that owing to the changes, improvements and transformation in their and their friends' behavior, there were fewer conflicts and fights in school and students refrained from using hurtful language. These findings are in line with the results of other studies by western scholars such as Bettmann and Moore (1994), Bickmore (2002), Daunic et al., (2000). Humphries, (1999), Johnson and Johnson (2004), Jones (2004), Lane and McWhirter (1992), and Williamson et al., (1999).

Mediator students also claimed that the mediation process significantly improved their communication and empathy skills. They were able to better communicate with their friends and, through empathy, better understand what they felt and wanted. Perspective taking as the cognitive dimension of the empathy was also emphasized by Gehlbach (2004). Furthermore, mediator students also emphasized that as their conflict resolution skills developed and their behavior improved through mediation, their relationships with their friends improved as well. They stated that their friends felt proud of them for the contribution they made to the constructive resolution of their conflicts, that they hung out with them more, their relationships improved and they became more supportive. This supports Jones' (2004) findings that peer mediation creates a respectful and caring environment, and Johnson and Johnson's (1996) claim that these improvements are a central and significant hallmark of social development.

Mediator students claimed that they also used these skills outside the school context and mediated conflicts in their neighborhoods and among family members. We could argue that CRPM training and the mediation model implemented in schools may have an impact on students' social lives — in and out of schools. A positive transfer of the conflict resolution skills into other areas of students' lives was also accounted for by other researchers (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Moriarty & McDonald, 1991; Williamson et al., 1999).

Notwithstanding the positive aspects of mediation, some of the mediator students stated that being a mediator had some negative effects on their relationships with their friends. For instance, they resented that their friends were, at times, jealous, condescending, and hostile when they ended up being at fault, and were at odds with them. Furthermore, the voluntary nature of the mediation process may well be threatened when enforced by the mediators and result in resistance. Even though some disputants agreed to attend mediation, they sabotaged the session and displayed adverse reactions to mediators, which caused further problems. Some students did not really see mediation as an effective conflict resolution method or

showed resistance when it was imposed on them. Enforcing or imposing mediation by teachers or peers is not received well at the elementary level.

Besides the positive effects of mediation, 85% of the female and 68% of the male mediators pointed to the negative aspects of the process. The mediation process does not always produce positive results and seems to include some negative and destructive patterns as well. Chief among these were resistance to the mediation process, misconstruing others, a feeling of helplessness, communication problems, humiliation, negative attitude and missing classes. These problems indicate that successful implementation of mediation process in schools is a long-term endeavor. The process of changing the attitude and behavior of students requires a considerable amount of time and effort. Therefore, the total student body needs to develop an awareness of the goals and gains of conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs.

Conflict resolution and peer mediation training and skills directly affect and develop students' constructive conflict resolution skills, empathetic skills, self-expression skills, and understanding skills. Hence, the real and direct improvement is observed in students' positive life skills. As the students develop more positive life skills, they naturally resort less to negative and destructive conflict resolution strategies and destructive anger management methods. A decrease in violence and destructive behavior is a by-product, rather than a direct result. Therefore, the ultimate goal is not reduction or prevention of violence, but the development of positive, constructive and peaceful conflict resolution skills.

In light of these discussions, conflict resolution and peer mediation training programs could be said to offer mediator students significant personal gains. Mediator students may benefit the most from the training and implementation of the model. Students' achievement of a constructive and peaceful resolution of their own conflicts themselves, or through the facilitation of a peer, bears significant implications. On that same note, promoting a peer mediation model could contribute greatly to the personal development of students and increase instruction time. Thus, on one hand, student violence will decrease, and, on the other hand, students will acquire essential life skills and may improve academically.

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İlköğretim Akran Arabulucuların Arabuluculuk Uygulamalarına İlişkin Perspektifleri
(Özet)

Problem Durumu: Okul ortamında öğrenci çatışmalarının ortaya çıkması doğal ve kaçınılmazdır. Öğrenci çatışmalarıyla yetişkin ve güç odaklı disiplin yaklaşımlar ile başa çıkmaya çalışıldığında hem öğrenci davranışlarında olumlu değişimin ortaya çıktığı çok rastlanan bir durum değildir hem de öğrenmeye, öğretime ve yönetsel faaliyetlere ayrılabilecek çok değerli zaman boşa harcanmış olmaktadır. Bu nedenle öğrenci anlaşmazlıkları ve şiddeti ile başa çıkmak için alternatif yöntemlerin arayışı oldukça yaygındır. Anlaşmazlık çözümü ve akran arabuluculuk bu yaklaşımlardan bir tanesidir. Akran arabuluculuk modelinin öğrenci anlaşmazlıkları üzerindeki etkisine yönelik çok sayıda araştırma yapılmıştır. Bu araştırmaların sonucunda arabuluculuğa getirilen öğrenci anlaşmazlıklarının hemen hemen %90 ile %100'ünün yapıcı ve barışçıl anlaşmayla sonuçlandığı saptanmıştır (Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss, 2007; Bell, Coleman, Anderson, & Whelan, 2000; Johnson and Johnson, 2001; Johnson , Johnson, Mitchell, Cotton, Harris, & Louison, 1996; Smith, Daunic, Miller, & Robinson, 2002; Burrell, Zirbell, & Allen, 2003). Bu araştırmalarda genelde öğrenci anlaşmazlıklarının anlaşmayla sonuçlanıp sonuçlanmadığı üzerinde durulmuştur. Buna karşın arabuluculuk sürecinin değerlendirilmesine çok az yer verilmiştir. Bu nedenle bu boşluğun doldurulması için arabuluculuk toplantılarını yöneten arabulucuların gözünden sürecin değerlendirilmesine gereksinim bulunmaktadır.

Araştırmanın Amacı: Bu araştırmanın amacı, İlköğretim dördüncü ve beşinci sınıf düzeyinde, akran arabulucuların, arabuluculuk deneyimlerine ilişkin görüşlerini incelemektir. Bu bağlamda altı sorunun yanıtı aranmaktadır. Bunlar: Arabulucu öğrenciler arabulucu olduklarında hangi duyguları yaşadılar? Arabulucu olmanın olumlu tarafları nelerdir? Arabulucu olmanın olumsuz tarafları nelerdir? Arabuluculuk, öğrencilerin arkadaşlarıyla olan ilişkilerini nasıl etkiledi? Müzakere ve arabuluculuk eğitimi aldıktan ve arabuluculuk yaptıktan sonra arabulucuların davranışlarında ortaya çıkan değişimler nedir? Arabuluculuk programının uygulanması okulda yaşanan öğrenci çatışmalarını nasıl etkiledi?

Araştırmanın Yöntemi: Bu araştırma nitel araştırma tekniklerinden yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniği kullanılarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Öğrenciler arasında yaşanan anlaşmazlıkların çözümünde en fazla arabuluculuk yapan gönüllü öğrenciler ile görüşme yapılarak araştırma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Toplam 60 arabulucu öğrenci ile görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler ses kayıt cihazları ile kaydedilip, daha sonra bilgisayar ortamına transkrip edilerek aktarılmıştır. Elde edilen nitel veriler içerik analizi yapılarak analiz edilmiştir. Analiz sürecinde ilk olarak, tüm veriler defalarca okunarak metne aşinalık kazanılmıştır. İkinci olarak 60 arabulucu öğrencinin verilerinden araştırmanın kategorileri çıkartılmıştır. Üçüncü olarak çok detaylı olan kategoriler genel kategoriler haline dönüştürülmüştür. Daha sonra bu kategorilere göre tüm metin kodlanmıştır. Kodlama süreci gerçekleştirilmeden önce araştırmacının kodlama güvenirliğine bakılmıştır. Yapılan güvenirlik analizinde ".90, 90" kodlama güvenirliği bulunmuştur. İçerik analizinden sonra bulgular hem

frekans ve yüzde ile hem de öğrenci söylemleri doğrudan verilerek sunulmuştur. Böylece hem istatistiksel hem de nitel karşılaştırmalar yapılmıştır.

Araştırmanın Bulguları: Arabulucu öğrencilere arabulucu olduklarında hissettikleri duygular sorulduğunda oldukça çarpıcı söylemler ifade etmişlerdir. Bunlar, mutluluk, heyecan, sevinç, kendini farklı hissetmedir. Bu duygular ve ifadeler çok anlamlıdır. Hem kız arabulucular hem de erkek arabulucular benzer söylemlerde bulunmuşlardır. Arabulucu öğrenciler için arabulucu olmanın kendileri için olumlu taraflarının neler olduğu sorulduğunda öne çıkardıkları temalar şunlardır: Yeni bilgi ve beceriler kazanma, iyilik duygusu, insanları barıştırma, kişisel gelişim, diğer insanları daha iyi anlama, çatışmaların önlenmesi ve azaltılması ve sosyalleşmedir. Buna karşın arabulucu olmanın kendileri için olumsuz taraflarının neler olduğu sorulduğunda ise şunları söylemişlerdir: Arkadaşları tarafından yanlış anlaşılma, arabuluculuğa direnç, bazen arkadaşları barıştıramama, küçük düşürülme ve dersleri kaçırma. Arabulucu öğrenciler arabulucu olmanın arkadaş ilişkilerinde hem olumlu hem de olumsuz etkileri olduğunu belirtmişlerdir. Olumsuz etkilerin başında yanlış anlaşılma ve kıskanılma vurgulanmıştır. Arabulucular, bazı arkadaşları ile aralarının açıldığını vurgulamışlardır. Buna karşın, olumlu gelişim olarak ise bazı arkadaşları ile araları iyileşmiş, kişisel gelişim sağlamışlar ve kendilerinin arabulucu olmalarından dolayı bazı arkadaşlarının sevindiğini belirtmişlerdir. Arabulucu öğrencilere arabulucu olduktan sonra davranışlarında ortaya çıkan değişim sorulduğunda ise şu temalar öne çıkarılmıştır: empatik gelişim, sorun çözme becerilerinde gelişim, sorun çözme becerilerinin okul dışına transferi, kişisel gelişim ve davranışlarında ortaya çıkan olumlu değişim. Benzer biçimde öğrencilere okullarında uygulanan anlaşmazlık çözümü, akran arabuluculuk eğitim programının uygulanmasının ortaya çıkardığı etkiler sorulduğunda ise şunlar vurgulanmıştır: Öğrenci çatışmalarında ve kavgalarında azalma, öğrenciler arası ilişkilerin gelişimi ve daha yapıcı olması, öğrencilerin iletişim becerilerinde gelişme ve öğrencilerin çatışma çözme becerilerinde gelişmedir.

Araştırmanın Sonuçları ve Önerileri: Öğrenci söylemleri referans alındığında akran arabuluculuk yaklaşımının öğrenciler tarafından benimsendiği söylenebilir. Arabulucuların, bu sorun çözme modelini olumlu karşıladıklarını ve arabuluculuk yaparken kendilerini iyi hissettikleri saptanmıştır. Benzer biçimde arabulucu öğrenciler arkadaşlarının aralarındaki anlaşmazlığın çözümünde görev almaktan ve onları barıştırmaktan dolayı kendileri ile gurur ve onur duydukları saptanmıştır. Öğrencilerin söylemleri referans alındığında arabuluculuğun öğrencilerin özsaygılarını geliştirmede etkisi olan bir yaklaşım olduğu söylenebilir. Arabulucu öğrenciler arabulucu olduktan sonra dönüşüm yaşadıklarını vurgulamışlardır. Arabulucular benzer biçimde arabuluculuk sürecinin hem iletişim becerilerinde hem de empati becerilerinin gelişmesinde olumlu gelişim yarattığını belirtmişlerdir. Arabulucular hem arkadaşları ile daha iyi iletişim kurduklarını, hem de empati kurmasını öğrenerek onların isteklerini ve duygularını daha iyi anladıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Arabulucular hem kendi davranışlarında hem de arkadaşlarının davranışlarında ortaya çıkan değişime, gelişime ve dönüşüme parallel olarak hem okullarında hem de sınıflarında çatışmaların ve kavgaların azaldığını, öğrencilerin

artık birbirlerine kötü söz söylememeye çalıştığını belirtmişlerdir. Bu görüşlere paralel olarak arabulucular sorun çözme becerilerinde ve davranışlarında ortaya çıkan değişime paralel olarak arkadaşlarıyla ilişkilerinin geliştiğini, çatışan öğrencilere arabuluculuk yaptıktan sonra onlarla arkadaşlıklarının geliştiğini vurgulamışlardır. Arabulucular çatışmalarının çözümüne katkı verdiği arkadaşlarının kendileriyle gurur duyduğunu, onlarla gezmeye başladıklarını, onlarla ilişkilerini geliştiğini ve arkadaşlarıyla daha dayanışmalı hale geldiklerini belirtmişlerdir. Arabulucu öğrenciler hem davranışlarında hem de sosyal ilişkilerinde ortaya çıkan olumlu değişime paralel olarak okul dışında da bu becerilerin yararlarını gördüklerini, dışarıda ortaya çıkan çatışmalara da arabuluculuk yaptıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Dolayısıyla okul ortamında öğrencilere verilecek anlaşmazlık çözümü ve akran arabuluculuk eğitiminin ve modelinin sadece okul içinde değil aynı zamanda da okul dışında da öğrencilerin sosyal yaşamlarını etkilediği söylenebilir. Tüm bu tartışmaların sonucunda, bir sorun çözme yaklaşımı olarak akran arabuluculuk modeli uygulandığı takdirde, arabulucu öğrencilerin anlamlı düzeyde kişisel kazanım elde edeceği söylenebilir. Belki de bu eğitimden ve modelin uygulamasından en fazla kazanç elde edecek kişiler arabulucu öğrenciler olacaktır. Öğrencilerin kendi anlaşmazlıklarını kendilerinin ya da bir arkadaşlarının kolaylaştırıcılığında yine kendilerinin yapıcı ve barışçıl olarak çözümlemelerinin oldukça anlamlı sonuçlar doğurduğu söylenebilir. Bu çerçevede akran arabuluculuk modelinin yaygınlaştırılmasının öncelikle öğrencilerin kişisel gelişimlerinde daha sonra öğretime ayrılan zamanın arttırılmasına anlamlı katkıda bulunacağı söylenebilir. Dolayısıyla bir yandan öğrenci şiddeti azaltılırken diğer yandan da hem öğrencilere temel yaşam becerileri kazandırılacak hem de akademik gelişimlerine katkı verilmiş olunacaktır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Akran arabuluculuk, anlaşmazlık çözümü, barış eğitimi, okul disiplini