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A Case Study Integrating the Relationship Enhancement Model in Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

A literature review of empathic communication in conflict resolution was presented including the problem definition, the nature of conflict, current conflict resolution models, and an alternative solution using empathic communication in conflict resolution were discussed. Results of the literature concluded that resolving conflict was more successful when integrating empathic communication, implying that empathic communication is an effective component to conflict resolution.

Problem Definition

There is an increasing amount of violence in high schools throughout the U.S. (Chen, 2003). This violent behavior is demonstrated by taunting, bullying, fighting, vandalism, enraged aggression and pre-mediated acts of murder including frequent shootings (Bowman, 2002; Chen, 2003; Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003; "Teen Gunman", 2002). One of the most publicized incidences of school violence is the Columbine mass murders, which brings about an awareness of school safety and lack of school safety (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Many adolescent's who commit these acts of violence feel disconnected, bullied, and ostracized (Dwyer, Osher & Wagner, 1998). This awareness leads us to focus on how violence can be manifested through destructive consequences of inter-personal conflict (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003). Unfortunately, many schools are not addressing interpersonal conflict as a component of this crisis. Instead, they are attending to the violent behavior, focusing on physical qualities of safe schools and disciplinary interventions (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003; Mitchell & Banks, 1996). Meanwhile, students who are demonstrating violent behavior may not know how to deal with conflict constructively. If this issue is not addressed, some students may continue to handle conflict in a destructive way, leading to further violent behavior (Mitchell & Banks, 1996).

Problem with only addressing physical qualities of safe schools

Several schools only address the physical qualities of safe schools such as locked doors, surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and police presence (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003). Although these efforts are useful in decreasing violence, safe schools seem to have one common denominator, a culture that is based on civility. These efforts do

nothing to increase a culture of civility (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003). Recently, there has

been some confusion on what civility actually means (Carter, 1998). While some assume

that civility is based on good manners and being polite, this definition is not sufficient.

The true meaning of civility goes much deeper.   According to Carter (1998), a Harvard

law professor, civility is an attitude of respect and even love for our fellow citizens.

Cheshire Calhoune (2000) argues that civility is communicating an attitude of respect

toward others. Respect toward others such as friends and family may come from

empathy or affection, civility toward strangers in the halls means that students behave in

a respectful manner to people who may mean nothing to them, and some students may

not find a reason to respect them. When students learn how to generalize empathy

toward all people, this may drive them to hold back when pursuing there own immediate

interest and think for a second, "Am I doing the right thing?" (Carter, 1998).

There has been a dramatic increase of incivility in our schools. The National

Association of Secondary School Principals found that 89% of teachers and principals

experience abusive language from students on a regular basis (Anderson, 2001). The

reason why civility is imperative is because it facilitates social cooperation, leading to an

environment conducive to feeling safe and secure while ultimately providing the

surrounding's in which students can learn (Chen, 2003). Unfortunately civility is not

typically addressed in schools. One reason for this is because some believe that it is the

parents job, not the schools job, to do this (Talk Back Live, 2001).

Problem with only using disciplinary interventions

Other measures schools use to address violence are disciplinary interventions such

as detentions, punishment, in-school suspensions, out of school suspensions, and referrals

to alternative high schools (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003). These measures have not been found to decrease aggressive behavior that leads to conflict.   Subsequently, in many cases these measures have been found to actually increase the onset and maintenance of aggressive behavior that may lead to school violence (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003).   This could possibly be due to the reality that some of these students do not have the opportunity to express themselves. When students do not feel heard, this may lead to feeling unaccepted, powerless, and resentful. These feelings could result in aggression towards others, which can increase destructive behavior leading to violence (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003).

Although several people frequently see violence as a problem, many often do not consider conflict as the underlying reason for the problem (Mitchell & Banks, 1996). To overlook conflict may be dangerous for the reason that unresolved conflict can result in resentment, which may lead to destructive consequences.   Unfortunately several schools address violence with physical and disciplinary interventions instead of dealing with the underlying motive for the violence, which is that many students have not learned and have not had experience in dealing with conflict constructively (Mitchell & Banks, 1996). This approach would be comparable to sweeping dirt under the carpet. The problem is still at hand. To truly address the problem of violence, schools might need to go deeper, meaning that it may be necessary to address a way for students to constructively deal with conflict (Mitchell & Banks, 1996).

Learning becomes secondary

When students do not feel safe, they may have an increasingly difficult time learning (Chen, 2003). Physical fights, violence against property, verbal harassment and

other forms of intimidating behavior may make our schools a threatening environment in

which to be (Chen, 2003; Katz & Lawyer, 1993). When students feel unsafe due to this

threatening environment, tension and fear may take over leaving personal safety as the

most important issue while learning becomes a secondary issue (Katz & Lawyer, 1993).

Lack of empathic communication

        The absence of empathy has been linked as a major contributor to acts of

aggression including violent behavior (Feshbach, 1979). For example, a student may be

able to feel the pain of another if they are being hit (Children Today, 1994).   If a student

can empathize with the fear or anger that another student is feeling when they are lashing

out, that student may be better equipped to diffuse the situation and prevent the violent

act. On the other hand, if a student does not sense another students' pain when he or she

is lashing out, that student may retaliate in a destructive way, escalating the situation and

increasing the chance of violence (Children Today, 1994). According to Katz and Lawyer

(1993), the most important ingredient for safe schools is for students to use empathic

communication. The problem is that many students lack this quality partially due to the

fact that we live in a hi-tech, fast paced, violent society which hinders the development of

empathy and fosters increased levels of aggression and violence (Kahn & Lawhorne,

2003). Without empathy, high school students are at an increasing risk of developing

aggressive behavior leading to violence (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003).

<div style="text-align:center">Nature of Empathy</div>

        The nature of empathy is perceived differently among experts in the field. It is

seen as either a cognitive construct, an affective phenomenon, or viewed as having

cognitive and affective components depending on the situation (Changming & Hill,

1996). Those that view empathy as an affective phenomenon see it as a person responding to another person's emotions (Allport, 1961; Langer, 1967; Mehrabian & Epstein, 1972; Stotland, 1969). Those that see empathy as a cognitive construct see empathy as an understanding of the intellectual experience of another person (Barett-Lennard, 1962; Borke, 1971; Deutsch & Madle, 1975; Kalliopuska, 1986; Katz, 1963; Kohut, 1971; Rogers, 1986; Woodall & Kogler-Hill, 1982). The third perspective of empathy contains both cognitive and affective components and argues that a person responds to the intellectual and/or affective experiences of another, depending on the situation (Brems, 1989; Hoffman, 1977; Shantz, 1975; Strayer, 1987). Some experts such as Feshbach (1975) and Strayer (1987) stated that the cognitive and affective components of empathy can not be separated and that they will always influence each other. These different perspectives call for a more systematic way to research empathy as a cognitive or affective phenomenon and to more clearly view the relationship between the two constructs (Changming & Hill, 1996). In the mean time, these two definitions should not overlap, therefore recently the term intellectual empathy is used to refer to the cognitive process and empathic emotions is used to refer to the affective dimension of empathic experience (Changming & Hill, 1996). These terms allow people to research cognitive and affective components of empathy as separate entities until further research is done on how the two components influence each other (Changming & Hill, 1996).

Nature of Conflict

Conflict is inevitable to all human beings (Katz & Lawyer, 1993). It is important to understand the nature of conflict because it demystifies a concept that may appear frightening without an understanding of it (Katz & Lawyer, 1993). Interpersonal conflict

is a situation or state between two people, which is characterized by perceived differences that the parties evaluate as negative, therefore resulting in a negative emotional state and resulting in behaviors intended to overcome the opposition (Katz & Lawyer, 1993). It is usually about a person and her or his relationship with another person and is driven by the feelings pertaining to the relationship with each other (Cochran, Cochran & Hatch, 2002). Conflict development occurs naturally and is necessary for healthy human development (Chen, 2003; Leneghan, 2000; Piaget, 1932).

Reason for Conflict Development

Piaget (1932) argued that interpersonal conflict is a natural way of reducing egocentrism because it provides a natural opportunity for children to confront each other, therefore beginning to consider other points of view (Chen, 2003). Although conflict seems to occur naturally, conflict resolution methods do not seem to develop naturally (Cochran, Cochran & Hatch, 2002). According to Leneghan (2000), egocentrism that drives conflict is not automatically reduced when conflict occurs because the individual may become defensive, therefore increasing his or her egocentrism.   Egocentrism seems to be reduced when a disputant experiences hearing and understanding another person with empathy because the focus is taken off of themselves and is directed toward another person (Cochran, Cochran & Hatch, 2002).

Positive and Negative Consequences of Conflict

Conflict can bring about positive and/or negative consequences. Deutsch (1993) explained that conflict is an inevitable feature of all social relation's and can take a constructive or destructive course. Unfortunately, schools often view conflict as negative, perhaps because students often evaluate their differences as negative and the

conflicts are poorly managed (Katz & Lawyer, 1993).   Poorly managed and unresolved

conflict brings about pain in the people involved with the conflict, and because it is

human nature to want to avoid pain, people naturally want to resolve conflict (Katz &

Lawyer, 1993). This has brought about many dimensions of conflict resolution (Katz &

Lawyer, 1993). Although conflict has resulted in destruction and even death, conflict has

also resulted in increased effectiveness, enhanced relationships, further goal attainment,

and an increased potential for people to learn and grow (Katz & Lawyer, 1993).

Negative Results of Conflict

When disputing parties try to achieve their goals, while not taking into account

the other person, forceful methods naturally occur and negative results of conflict can

result. This brings about an increased amount of conflict, which becomes more difficult

to reverse (Katz & Lawyer, 1993). According to Katz & Lawyer, (1993) when these

forceful methods are used, the following negative results can occur: 1) What was once a

minor difference can escalate into major conflict resulting in a major loss for both parties.

2) The number of issues in the conflict increase, which causes further complexity making

it more difficult to manage the situation. 3) The relationship can be called into question

4) The disputants intentions may switch from first, trying to get their specific interest

satisfied to becoming preoccupied at beating the other party at all costs. 5) The number of

people involved with the conflict can increase making the conflict more complex and

more difficult to de-escalate. These results may be due to destructive processes in the

resolution of conflict including competition, poor communication, coercive tactics,

suspicion, the perception of different values, and trying to increase ones own power in the

relationship (Deutsch, 1969).

Positive Results of Conflict

Positive results of conflict can benefit people by providing an opportunity for creativity, renewed energy, drama, development and growth to the individual therefore increasing cohesiveness and trust (Katz & Lawyer, 1993). According to Katz & Lawyer (1993), it can: 1) foster a keener sense of identity and solidarity, 2) increase the effectiveness of ones interactions, 3) promote internal change which can lead to self growth, 4) facilitate disputants in clarifying the real problem, and 5) bring forth a reconciliation with shared interests. According to Deutsch (1969), these results are due to good communication, perceived similar values and beliefs, fully accepting another as legitimate, problem-centered negotiations, and mutual trust leading to information sharing. It is important to address conflict in schools so that students can benefit from these positive results of conflict not only in school, but learn how to constructively use conflict throughout their lives.

Strategies used to address conflict

Collaboration, compromise, accommodation, control, and avoidance are five strategies that are available to address conflict (Katz & Lawyer, 1993). Collaboration is a win/win strategy in which all parties work together to achieve everybody's best interest. Compromise is a mini-win/ mini-lose strategy where each party tries to win as much as possible while still preserving the inter-personal relationship as much as possible. At the end, each party is partially satisfied. Accommodation is a yield/lose strategy in which one party gives in to the other party in order to protect the relationship. Controlling is a win-lose strategy in which one party wins by controlling, or imposing a preferred solution on the other party. This strategy often results in sacrificing the relationship because the

achieved desired outcome is held at a higher priority. Avoidance is a lose/lose strategy

where both parties avoid the conflict, which leads to both disputants abandoning the

desired outcome and opportunity to enhance the relationship (Katz & Lawyer, 1993).

Current Conflict Resolution Models

There are many definitions of conflict resolution. Mitchell and Banks (1996)

define Conflict Resolution as "an outcome in which the issues in an existing conflict are

satisfactorily dealt with through a solution that is mutually acceptable to the parties, self

sustaining in the long run and productive of a new positive relationship between parties

that were previously hostile adversaries; and any process or procedure by which such an

outcome is achieved" (p. XVII). John Burton (1997) defines conflict resolution as "a

problem-solving exercise that aims at the elimination of the sources of the conflict, not

merely the management of the conflict or the settlement (often through coercive power in

a way that does not meet the needs of all parties) of the manifest dispute" (p.498).

According to the Conflict Research Consortium (1998), Conflict Resolution refers to the

process of resolving a dispute or a conflict permanently, by providing each sides' needs,

and adequately addressing their interests so that they are satisfied with the outcome.

The conflict resolution definition used by Mitchell and Banks (1996) will be used

for the context of this paper due to the fact that the definition recognizes that the

resolution process is "productive of a new positive relationship between parties that were

preveiously hostile adversaries" (p.XVII). In this definition, the situation is not only

resolved, also the relationship between the disputants is changed from a negative

relationship to a positive one.

The types of conflict resolution approaches that will be discussed are

1) Constructive Conflict Resolution approach, 2) Integrative Negotiations, 3) the Problem Solving Approach, 4) Integrative Bargaining, and 5) Eclectic Models that Integrate more than one approach.

Constructive Conflict Resolution Model

Deutsch (1993) designed the Constructive Conflict Resolution Model, which is defined by the following characteristics (Deutsch, 1993): 1) Discover the type of conflict that has taken place while not falling into the common error of thinking of the conflict as a win-lose conflict because very few conflicts are. Too often, they are thought to be such and this results in a destructive competitive way of conflict resolution. 2) Even when one is angered, be conscious of alternatives to violence. 3) Don't run away from the conflict; deal with it. 4) Respect the interests of yourself and others. 5) Be aware of, accept, and understand cultural differences. 6) Make sure that you distinguish between positions (which may be opposed) and interests (which may not be opposed). 7) Explore the interests of yourself and others to see if there are any common interests.

Integrative Negotiations

Under the premise of Integrative Negotiations, conflict is defined and resolved by a mediator through the following steps (Johnson & Johnson, 2003; Pruitt, 1981): 1)Conflict is defined as a small and specific issue. 2) Conflict is defined as a problem to be solved rather than a test of dominance. 3) Explain the underlying reasons for your wants and feelings so not only interests are clear, but also the entire position is clear. 4) Take the opponents perspective into account. 5) Create reasoning and synthesis to identify options that both parties can agree upon. 6) Decide which option to adopt.

Problem Solving Approach

In the Problem Solving Approach, conflicts are defined by issue, not people (Hill, 1982). The role of the mediator is to introduce the conflict as a problem to be solved, not a competition to be won, and to provide insight into the resolution process, while not judging the disputants. The approach involves six steps which are: Step 1) Each party defines the conflict, Step 2) Gather information regarding the conflict, Step 3) Assess optional solutions, Step 4) Deciding among options, Step 5) Gathering more information Step 6) Creating new solutions, Step 7) Redefining the conflict, and Step 8) Deciding upon a resolution (Hill, 1982).

Integrative Bargaining

The Integrative Bargaining approach has each party take an extreme position to ask for what they want and then a mediator listens to each party's explanation. The mediator then decides upon a settlement. The two parties use extreme positions instead of moderate ones so that they will reach a better outcome (Komorita & Brenner, 1968). Also, they choose extreme positions because there is less chance of them being exploited (Rubin & Brown, 1975). Wilson and Bisenstine (1964) argued that often parties will feel foolish and weak when they are being asked to do something unrealistic for the other party. This may result in acts of retaliation against the other party causing them to feel humiliated. It has been proven that parties will retaliate, even if they have to sacrifice all or a large amount of the available outcomes of the resolution to maximize their opponents displeasure (Brown, 1968; Siegel & Fouraker, 1960).

Eclectic Models

    Teaching Students to be Peacemakers Program

Teaching Students to be Peacemakers is a four-step program (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). This program teaches students to resolve conflicts through a variety of techniques including: Part 1: Understanding the nature of conflict by recognizing when it is and is not occurring, and remembering the constructive potential conflict can create.

Part 2: Choosing an Appropriate Conflict Strategy while focusing on two major concerns which are (a) to achieve one's goals and (b) to maintain a good relationship with the other person. These factors are important to look at because they determine a persons strategy. The strategy's include a) withdrawal (losing both the relationship and the goal), force (giving up the relationship in order to achieve the goal), smooth (keep the relationship by giving up the goal), compromise (both parties give up a part of the goal to save the relationship), or negotiation (achieving the goal while keeping the relationship).

Part 3: Negotiating to Solve the Problem. Negotiation is first used to resolve the conflict. If negotiation does not work then the disputants will move on to mediation. In negotiation, the parties have two choices: (a) distributive negotiation (this occurs when one person gives in and the other benefits), and (b) integrative negotiation (where both parties brainstorm ideas in which they are both happy with). Integrative negotiation has been shown to maintain and even enhance disputant's relationships. The problem-solving, integrative negotiation procedure consists of six steps (Johnson & Johnson, 1995) including 1) Communicating specifically what your wants are, for example, "I want to stay out until 11:30 p.m. 2) Describing accurately how you feel. "I'm feeling frustrated". 3) Describing the reasons for your feelings. "I feel frustrated because I do not have control over when I come home on Saturday night" 4) Take into consideration the other persons position, feelings, and underlying reasons for both. "O.K. so what you are

saying is…. and you are feeling…. ". 5) Work together to create three optional solutions

to the problem. 6) Figuring out the best solution and formalizing it by shaking hands. <u>Part</u>

<u>4:</u> Mediation. If disputants can't come to a solution, a mediator will facilitate that

process. Mediation consists of 4 steps (Johnson & Johnson, 1995) Step 1) Ending

hostilities. The mediator must make sure that the disputants are not emotionally charged

to the point that they can't focus on a solution. Step 2) Making sure disputants are

committed to the process of mediation by asking each person and only proceeding if they

both answer "yes". Each person is informed that they will be able to tell their side of the

story without anyone interjecting. Step 3) Going over the ground rules which are: a) both

agree to find a solution b) no name calling c) no interruptions d) be honest e) when

reaching a solution, follow through with it and f) what is said in mediation is only said to

find a solution, meaning that each participant must try to be constructively moving

toward a solution instead of using destructive tendencies such as blaming or complaining.

Step 4) The mediation is formalized by having disputants sign a mediation report form.

The mediator holds onto the report form and follows up by making sure each person is

holding their end of the bargain.

Conflict Resolution Working Model

The Conflict Resolution Working Model, which was created by Katz & Lawyer

(1993), involves 4 stages as well as an overall frame work of viewing each person with

respect and acting with integrity in order to develop a rapport with the other party.

Important aspects of this framework are: a) resourcefulness-being alert and relaxed at the

same time in order for conflict resolution skills to be fully accessed and b) Positive

Presuppositions-remembering that people are doing the best that they know how to do at

any given moment and being aware of the fact that there is a solution out there with the

mindset of cooperation instead of competition. The 4 stages include (Katz & Lawyer,

1993): 1) Awareness-becoming aware of negative emotional feelings. 2) Self-

Preparation-by owning ones own emotions, one is able to decrease his or her emotional

state in the hopes of thinking more clearly. 3) Conflict Management-reflective listening

will facilitate each person in decreasing their emotional state leading them to clarify their

similarities and differences. 4) Negotiation-finally deciding on a mutually agreed upon

outcome.

<center>Alternative Solution: Conflict Resolution Using the Relationship Enhancement</center>

<center>Model</center>

Effective conflict resolution involves the ability to empathically take into account

another persons point of view (Chen, 2003). Most conflict resolution programs do not

include empathic communication as a goal (Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003) and instead make

the goal an attempt to eliminate the conflict. The difference in using empathic

communication for conflict resolution is that the main objective is not to eliminate

conflict but to allow the disputants to use conflict in a constructive manner (Katz &

Lawyer, 1993). Many conflict resolution programs are characterized by focusing on

mediation, negotiation and problem solving. While these strategies use communication

between the disputants as part of the resolution, usually a third party (mediator) is used to

reflect what each disputant is saying, and suggest alternatives for the individuals in

dispute to facilitate them in making decisions based on outside factors such as avoiding

punishment or gaining external rewards (Johnson & Johnson, 1995; Sweeney and

Carruthers, 1996). Based on the idea that conflict is characterized by perceived

differences that parties evaluate as negative (Katz & Lawyer, 1993), I would like to

propose an alternative solution to conflict resolution that is based on empathic listening,

using the Relationship Enhancement Model (Guerney, 1977).   By using empathic

communication, both parties are able to change perceived differences by empathically

connecting to their disputant while negotiation, problem solving, and advice often

become unnecessary or naturally occur (Cochran, Cochran & Hatch, 2002). This

happens because disputants are enabled to reach a deeper understanding of each other.

Increased levels of self-esteem, an increased amount of respect for self and others, an

increased level of empathy, emotional maturity, and a higher level of skills in developing

meaningful relationships are all results of this approach to conflict resolution (Cochran,

Cochran & Hatch, 2002).

Relationship Enhancement Model (Guerney, 1977)

Bernard G. Guerney created the Relationship Enhancement model in the 1960's

(Empathic Coaching Associates, 2005). The purpose of this model is to teach people

skills that will facilitate close and stable relationships as well as helping people resolve

inter personal conflicts. This model has been used to intervene in conflict as well as

prevent it an is designed to teach skills that will help people improve their coping

abilities, enrich their relationships, improve their self-concept and achieve interpersonal

as well as personal satisfaction. The reason why the relationship enhancement model is

successful is because it focuses on each party understanding their self as well as

understanding others, through empathy, and teaches individuals how to communicate this

understanding. This type of communication facilitates a constructive change in the

relationship. When people learn and utilize these skills, they begin to trust themselves in

being able to handle life's hardships. This may result in more satisfaction and stability in their lives. The relationship enhancement model is highly structured with rules for the speaker, listener, and facilitator (Empathic Coaching Associates, 2005).   <u>Rules for the Speaker:</u> 1) State your position. 2) Talk to the listener, not the facilitator. 3) Look the speaker in the eyes when speaking to them. It does not have to be constant eye contact (which may feel unnatural), but some eye contact is more conducive to the nature of empathy, and increases the focus on feelings during the resolution process 4) Try to focus on your emotions throughout the process. 5) Concentrate on telling your story, try to keep the focus on yourself.

<u>Rules for the Listener</u> 1) Keep frequent eye contact with the speaker. 2) Once in a while, summarize back to the speaker what he or she is saying to you. 3) Follow rule #2 even if you do not believe what the speaker is saying is true. 5) When paraphrasing, state feelings that you think the speaker is expressing. If you paraphrase something and the speaker corrects you, accept those corrections until the speaker is satisfied that you understand them. 6) When the speaker feels understood, it will be time for you to say your side of the story and the speaker now becomes the listener..

<u>Rules for the Facilitator</u> 1) Make sure the speaker and the listener understand and are following the rules. (Keep in mind that small details are not as important as the spirit of the rules). For example, eye contact is important but it's o.k. if one looks away. Even just a small moment of eye contact has been helpful in allowing ones true feelings to come to the surface. Also, although it is best for the listener to paraphrase the speakers feelings, this may seem difficult to the listener, therefore, in this case, the facilitator may encourage the parties to focus on each other and reflect the feelings that they are

expressing. 2. Don't sit in a place of attention, and look at the listener not the speaker. The speaker will often speak to the facilitator if the facilitator is facing them. 3) If the listener needs help paraphrasing, help them by asking the speaker to re-say the last statement he or she said or help the listener think of ways to paraphrase what the speaker has said. 4) Be aware of hurdles in communication and facilitate them on getting back on track. 5) Be consistent in keeping the communicators on track while being gentle at the same time. For example, if the speaker starts to speak to the facilitator, simply point your finger over to the listener to remind them to talk to the listener, 6) Listen for the time when the speaker seems to have finished or said his/her piece. When this seems clear to you, you can make sure the speaker is satisfied the listener has heard and understood by asking. 7) Observe the process of the communication. After the intervention is completed, you may acknowledge and summarize the communication efforts that have occurred and make expressions of empathy or genuine response to either or both involved. Few other comments would be helpful. Though there may be a temptation to ask questions or offer advice, it is good to remember that this would mark a shift in responsibility from the parties in conflict to the facilitator outside the conflict (Cochran, Cochran & Hatch, 2002).

Motivation to empathically communicate in conflict resolution is created by giving the individual in conflict a way to see into each others worlds and feel, even for a short period of time, what the other feels. Students are often much more ready to envision another's world than adults are. When adults focus on giving a solution or giving advice, student's unique ability to solve their own problems is doubted and in turn the students

may doubt their ability to find a resolution without an adult (Cochran, Cochran, & Hatch, 2002).

Summary

There is a large body of research indicating different approaches to conflict resolution. Based on this review of the literature, empathy is an important tool when addressing conflict because empathy does not only eliminate the conflict, but uses the constructive potential of conflict to enhance relationships. I am implementing an empathically based conflict resolution program, using the Relationship Enhancement Model, into a middle class high school in upstate NY. The goal of using this model is to facilitate the students in using conflict in a constructive matter to ultimately gain confidence in handling conflict and enhance their relationships with others.

Methods

Rationale for Research Design

Based on the review of the literature, empathy is a highly effective means to conflict resolution (Cochran, Cochran & Hatch, 2002; Empathic Coaching Associates, 2005; Kahn & Lawhorne, 2003; Mitchell & Banks, 1996), yet many conflict resolution models to not include empathy as a component. An empathically based conflict resolution process was designed, using the Relationship Enhancement model (Guerney, 1977) to resolve conflict as well as enhance participants self-efficacy in resolving conflict, reduce the number of conflicts participants are in, increase participants willingness to resolve conflict, feel as if they have been heard by the individual that he or she is in conflict with and develop a deeper understanding of the disputant that the participant is in conflict with.

Rationale for the Use of a Case Study

The relationship enhancement model (Guerney, 1977) is used in conflict

resolution among high school student's. This approach is illustrated using a case

example in order for the reader to have a deeper understanding of how this approach is

used in order for it to be more easily applied.

Researchers Role in the Data Collection Procedure

The researcher took the role of the facilitator in the conflict resolution program.

Before the conflict resolution approach was applied the researcher developed a

questionnaire with a 1-10 scale to measure participants view of their efficacy in resolving

conflicts, how often each participant viewed themselves in conflicts with others, how

willing each participant was in resolving this specific conflict, how much they believe

their disputant understands their point of view as well as how well they think they

understand their disputants point of view. Additional space was left at the bottom of the

questionnaire for participants to add information if they would like (see appendix A).

The researcher distributed the questionnaire five minutes before the conflict resolution

session began to have each participant fill it out. Next, the researcher conducted the

conflict resolution session. Immediately after the session was complete, the researcher

recorded what had happened in the conflict resolution session, from beginning to end.

Three days after the session took place, the researcher met with each participant

individually, administering the same questionnaire for each of them to fill out.

Site

The high school in which this empathy-based conflict resolution program was

implemented is in Western N.Y. The town has a population of 38,000 and includes a

variety of housing such as mostly family-oriented subdivisions, but there are also historic homes in the village, communities for senior citizens, and rural areas as well. (Town of Webster, 2005) There is a variety of community and industrial properties including major manufacturing sites as well as locally owned businesses within the community (Town of Webster, 2005).

The school district serves approximately eight thousand students who attend seven elementary, two middle, and two high schools. The school enrollment for the year 2004-2005 was 369 freshman, 340 sophomores, 272 juniors and 295 seniors. Students scored above the State mean scores as well as the National mean scores for the Scholastic Aptitude Test as well as the ACT in 2004. The school district also offers the largest number of Advanced Placement courses in the Greater Rochester Area with 24 Advanced Placement courses offered. In 2004, 88% of students went on to college, 54% attending 4 year degree granting colleges while 34% attended 2 year degree granting colleges. Others (8%) went on to become employed and 1% went into the military. The classes are organized in a block format for 80 minutes on an alternating day basis.

Procedure for Access to Participants

To access the participants for this study the conflict resolution process was discussed with school administrators including the four assistant principal's as well as the principal. In the discussion's, each administrator was asked for their support by referring students to the conflict resolution program. Referral forms were then created for each administrator. Separate referral forms were made to briefly explaining the conflict resolution process for each teacher in the building.

Informing the Principal about the conflict resolution program

A fifteen-minute appointment with the principal, to discuss the conflict resolution Program, was made to ask for his support. An explanation of how the model was going to be used, by showing him Appendix B, was discussed He demonstrated his support by approving the program and lent the researcher three books that he had on conflict resolution.

Informing Assistant Principals about the conflict resolution program

Four, fifteen minute appointments were made with each of the four assistant principals. The appointments were used to discuss the conflict resolution process that would take place and to ask for their support in referring any students in conflict to the program.

First I met with the 9th grade assistant principal. He was shown a copy of Appendix B, highlighting the role of the facilitator, speaker, and listener while it was verbally being explained to him. After understanding the approach that was going to be taken, he was open to the idea, saying "I'm sold". Next, the 10th and 12th grade assistant principals were met with at the same time. Sitting down at a table, the conflict resolution approach was verbally described to them while showing them Appendix B. They had questions such as, "How do we refer students to you?" and "How many people are involved with this approach?" The questions were answered by suggesting that they write down the names of the students that they would like to refer and put them in the researcher's mailbox. The sophomore principal suggested that a referral slip be made up to refer students. The suggestion was agreed upon and a referral slip (Appendix C) that was copied and distributed to each of the 4 assistant principals was created. In response to the second question, they were informed that three people would be involved in the

conflict resolution process, the two students in conflict as well as the researcher who would be the facilitator. They were also made aware that if any other people were in the room helping the students resolve the conflict, it would be detrimental to the students progress because they may rely on outside sources to resolve conflicts, in turn, lowering their self-efficacy in resolving their own conflicts.

The 11th grade assistant principal was met with next. Appendix B was presented to him while the researcher explained the conflict resolution method. He responded with a concern that the 9th and 10th grade students may be using this model more than the juniors and seniors. He said that from his experience, as student's progress through high school, they tend to increasingly handle conflicts themselves without adult interventions. He said that he would be open to referring students, but was not sure if he would have many students that would be willing to do it.

Informing Teachers about the conflict resolution program

After meeting with the principal and assistant principals and distributing the referrals to them, I developed a referral form that also discussed the conflict resolution program, and put them in every teacher's mailbox (Appendix D).

Procedure for Establishing a Research-Participant Working Relationship

To establish a research-participant working relationship, each participant was met with before the conflict resolution process took place in order to communicate with each participant what the conflict resolution procedure would entail. Each participant was listened to with sincerity, unconditional positive regard and empathy. They were aware of the fact that this resolution process was their decision and that they would not be forced to participate in this conflict resolution process. When each participant agreed and

was willing to partake in the conflict resolution program, the researcher used the student's willingness to determine that a research-participant working relationship was established.

Measures used for ethical protection

The researcher verbally informed each participant before the beginning of the conflict resolution session that their session as well as their answered questionnaires may be used for research purposes. They were also informed that their identity would be protected by using different names in the research. Each participant was then given the opportunity to decline as well as ask questions regarding the study. They were asked to keep what happens in their conflict resolution session confidential, but were also verbally informed that there is not a guarantee that their disputant would keep the session confidential. To maintain the confidentiality of participants in the study, the researcher has changed the names of each of the participants.

Criteria for selecting participants

The criteria for each participant was that he or she had to be a high school student, grade 9-12, in the school in which the research was being conducted. Each student was asked whether he or she was willing to participate in the resolution process after understanding that research may be conducted based on their conflict resolution process as well as informed about the procedure that would take place. If students agreed to participate in the resolution process, they were selected for the study. The researcher included two participants which created one case study. The reason why two participant's were selected was because the researcher found that a deeper depth of inquiry would give the reader a better sense of how the conflict resolution process was

conducted instead of being vague about what procedures took place. In turn, the reader

could apply this conflict resolution process in a school setting or elsewhere.

Data Collecting Procedures

The researcher collected data based on the results of the questionnaire that

participants filled out before and after the conflict resolution process as well as

documented narrative recordings regarding what took place before, during and after the

conflict resolution session. The questionnaire was administering to each participant,

individually in a room by themselves to fill out before the conflict resolution process took

place. Each participant was given 5 minutes to fill out the questionnaire and it was then

collected by the researcher immediately before the session took place. After the conflict

resolution session, the researcher immediately recorded, in narrative form, what occurred

before and during the conflict resolution session paying particular attention to what was

said, body positioning, eye contact, voice inflections, as well as emotions stated by the

participants at the beginning, middle, and end of the conflict resolution session. The data

was recorded on a computer with the names changed for the participants protection.

Three days after the conflict resolution session took place, the researcher met with each

participant on an individual basis to re-administer the questionnaire. Each participant

was given 5 minutes to fill out the questionnaire, in a room by themselves.

Procedure for analyzing data

The researcher's qualitative recordings of each session were analyzed by putting

them into a case-study format. Also, the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire were

analyzed by observing changes in the likert-type scales each participant circled as well as

comparing what they wrote on the "additional information" section before and after the

conflict resolution process, observing whether they wrote anything at all, their opinion about the process, whether they were still in the particular conflict, and whether they felt that the relationship was enhanced.

<div align="center">Results</div>

Research Questions

The questions addressed in the study were 1) Will an empathy-based conflict resolution program increase the confidence level of each participant when resolving conflicts? 2) Will an empathy-based conflict resolution program decrease how often each participant is in conflict with others? 3) Will an empathy-based conflict resolution program increase ones willingness to resolve conflicts? 4) Will an empathy-based conflict resolution program increase a feeling of being heard and understood by ones disputant? 5) Will an empathy-based conflict resolution program provide the participant with a deeper understanding of their disputant?

Research Tools

Data collection instruments consisted of a pre-questionnaire and a post-questionnaire as well as the researcher recording the experience in a case-study format. Fore each questionnaire, each participant was to circle a number on the likert-type scale for each of the five questions addressed in the study. Each participant was given the questionnaire five minutes before the conflict resolution process and then given the same questionnaire three days after the conflict resolution process. All participants filled the questionnaire out in a room by themselves to minimize any distractions. Each empathy-based conflict resolution case was recorded immediately after the conflict resolution session, by the researcher.

Case Study

A referral was received from the sophomore assistant principal. She said that she

would like for the conflict resolution meeting to take place within that day. A pass was

written out for each participant, and given to the hall monitors to give each student. Both

participants came in within the hour. When they came in, each of them sat down in a

separate room. While in the room, the facilitator sat down with each participant and used

a document (see Appendix B) to explain the empathy-based conflict resolution procedure

in a simple way. They were then informed that this conflict resolution process may be

used for research purposes and that their identity would be protected. They were then

asked if they had any comments or questions. Each of them responded, at separate times

saying that they would rather work it out themselves without a facilitator. They were

each informed that it was imperative that a facilitator was used in this type of conflict

resolution process and reminded that they were under no obligation to go through the

conflict resolution process. After asking if each of them understood the process and was

willing to respect it, they both said "yes". Although each participant was hesitant about

having a facilitator, they both chose to try the conflict resolution process over leaving the

office and not going through with it. They were then asked to fill out a pre-evaluation

form individually as they were still in separate rooms (see Appendix E). After each

participant was given five minutes to fill out the pre-evaluation form, both participants

were brought into the same room. The facilitator sat off to the side while each girl sat on

opposite ends of the room with their legs crossed away from each other, both of them

looking at the facilitator, not each other. They were asked "Who would like to start?"

Amelia said, "I'll start" and started by saying that she didn't like the fact that Kim (her

disputant) and all of Kim's friends are calling her names and threatening her when they see her in the hall. At this point, she was talking to the facilitator, so the facilitator stopped looking at Amelia and looked at Kim. Amelia started talking to Kim as soon as the facilitator looked at Kim. Amelia went on to say that Kim and her friends are just trying to start trouble and that their attempts to intimidate her were not working. Amelia was reminded to keep the focus on where she was coming from instead of focusing on where Kim and her friends were coming from. Amelia nodded her head and went on to say that she doesn't like it when Kim or her friends call her a "bitch" when she walks down the hall and that she wants this conflict to end. Kim responded, "Well…that's what..." in a loud, defensive tone. The facilitator quickly interjected and asked Kim to wait. Amelia was asked if she felt that she had accurately explained where she was coming from. She said "yes". Kim was then asked to explain, in her own words, where she thought Amelia was coming from. Kim hesitated and was not able to reflect what Amelia had said. Amelia said again, she doesn't like being called names in the hall. Kim then reflected by saying, O.K. so you feel threatened by us calling you a "bitch" in the halls. Amelia was asked if she thinks that Kim understood what she had just said. Amelia said that, that was accurate. Kim was then asked to explain to Amelia where she is coming from. Kim said that she believes that Amelia and all of her friends are giving Kim and her friend's dirty looks while walking down the hallways. She went on to say that she doesn't appreciate it and refuses to be disrespected by dirty looks when she feels that she has done nothing to deserve to be looked at like that. Amelia started responding immediately denying that her friends do that. The facilitator again, quickly interjected and told Amelia to wait. When Kim was done, Amelia was asked, "What did you just

hear?" Amelia rolled her eyes and asked again if the facilitator could leave the room so that they could work this out by themselves. The facilitator responded in a calm and direct manner, "no". Amelia then said to the facilitator "She thinks that we give her friends dirty looks when we walk down the hall". The facilitator then pointed and looked at Kim. Amelia then said to Kim, "You don't like when we give you dirty looks". Kim said that she would like to add that the reason why she thinks that her and her friends are receiving dirty looks is because they tried out for the cheerleading squad and didn't make it. Amelia, who is a cheerleader, said that has nothing to do with it. The facilitator interjected again and said "reflect on what she said". Amelia said, "You think that we don't like you because you tried out for the cheerleading squad and didn't make it." Kim said that she feels that the only reason that me, and my friend didn't make it was because of our race and that we came from the city. She also said that she felt like she was being laughed at during the try-outs.   Amelia reflected saying "You felt like you didn't make it because of your race and then, on top of that, you thought that you were being made fun of by my friends and I". Kim agreed. Amelia went on to confirm that she believes that what Kim was saying was true and she agreed that Kim should have made the squad but didn't because of her race and shared that it made her angry as well. At this point, they were both leaning in, legs crossed toward each other and making full eye contact. Amelia explained to Kim that she does not know what it felt like to not make the squad and continued expression how "stupid" she thought it was that Kim didn't make the squad. Amelia said, "I can understand why you and your friends would call me and my friends "bitches" if you though that we were laughing at you at try-outs because of your race or where you came from". Amelia went on to say that she would never laugh at her

because of that. Kim said that she feels a little better about the situation and views their

conflict as a big misunderstanding. Amelia stated that she feels a lot better now that they

have more of an understanding of each other. The facilitator asked, "Is there anything

else that either one of you would like to say?" Each participant said that they feel as

thought the conflict was resolved. They were then asked if they would like to meet with

the facilitator individually, within a few days, to process the conflict resolution process.

They both wanted to meet. Passes to their classes were written and on their way out of

the office, Amelia told Kim to wait up so they could walk out together.   They were met

with by the facilitator a few days later. Each participant communicated to the facilitator

that they instant messaged each other later that night and realized that they had a lot of

things in common. Each one of them said that she was excited about gaining a new

friend. Each of them filled out a post-evaluation form (Appendix F) and they both

thanked the facilitator for having them execute the conflict resolution process.

Pre-Questionnaire and Post-Questionnaire Results for Kim:

Pre-Questionnaire: Briefly explain the situation:

"Me and Amelia got into an argument because of another girl and Amelia got in it. So I

got mad and it went from there".

Post Questionnaire: Briefly explain the situation:

"The situation wit Amelia was a Big misunderstanding and it was stupid. But now we

talk and none of the gurlz look at us and we don't worry about each other or pay attention

we go our own ways.

How confident do you feel in resolving conflicts? (1 being not at all and 10 being *extremely confident)*

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

10   8

On a scale of 1-10, how often are you in conflict with others (1 being not at all and 10 being all the time.)

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

   10   10

On a scale of 1-10, how willing are you to resolve this conflict (1 being not at all and 10 being very willing)

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

   1   6

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being completely) how well do you think the other person that you are in conflict with understands where you are coming from?

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

   1   10

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being completely) how well do you think you understand where the person you are in conflict with is coming from?

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

   1   10

Pre-Questionnaire: Use the space below and the back of this paper if you would like to add any additional information.

Nothing was written.

Post-Questionnaire: Use the space below and the back of this paper if you would like to add any additional information.

"Mrs. Mullen helped us a lot. If we didn't have that meeting I don't think we could of

solved it and she made us see where we were all coming from and that's good. We talk

over the computer and we see that we have a lot in common so it's really nice to be o.k.

with each other".

Pre-Questionnaire and Post-questionnaire results for Amelia

Pre-Questionnaire: Briefly explain the situation:

"Kim and her friends had a problem with my friend Abbey and I said something to back

up Abbey then Kim called me trash words and it got into a huge fight".

Post Questionnaire: Briefly explain the situation:

"Me and Kim worked everything out and decided to be friends because we have a lot in

common".

How confident to you feel in resolving conflicts? (1 being not at all and 10 being extremely confident)

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

   8   10

On a scale of 1-10, how often are you in conflict with others (1 being not at all and 10 being all the time.)

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

6   3

On a scale of 1-10, how willing are you to resolve this conflict (1 being not at all and 10 being very willing)

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

9   10

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being completely) how well do you think the other person that you are in conflict with understands where you are coming from?

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

5   10

On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being completely) how well do you think you understand where the person you are in conflict with is coming from?

Pre-Questionnaire   Post-Questionnaire

4   10

Pre-Questionnaire: Use the space below and the back of this paper if you would like to add any additional information.

Nothing was written.

Post-Questionnaire: Use the space below and the back of this paper if you would like to add any additional information

"I think this was helpful because if we did it on our own I don't think we would of gotten anything accomplished".

Discussion

This research study was conducted to investigate whether empathic communication in conflict resolution facilitated in decreasing inter-personal conflict as well as enhance participant's individual relationships. A conflict resolution program was created for high school student's, utilizing the Relationship Enhancement model. The questions being addressed were: 1) Does this empathy-based conflict resolution program increase confidence in resolving conflict? 2) Does this empathy-based conflict resolution

program decrease how often one is in conflict? 3) Does this empathy-based conflict resolution program increase ones willingness to resolve conflict? 4) Does this empathy-based conflict resolution program increase the perception of one feeling heard and understood? 5) Does this empathy-based conflict resolution program increase the ability for one to hear and understand their disputant?

Based on the case example, the research findings indicated that, three days after the conflict resolution session, Kim perceived herself less confident in resolving conflict. She also perceived herself to be in an equal amount of conflict. In addition, she was further willing to resolve this conflict. Her feelings of being heard and understood by her disputant increased significantly while her understanding of her disputant also improved.

Amelia, the other participant in this case example, demonstrated research results indicating that she perceived herself to have more confidence in resolving conflict. Also, after the session, she perceived herself to be in less conflicts, she was more committed to resolve the conflict, her feelings of being heard and understood by her disputant increased, and her understanding of her disputant also drastically increased.

These findings indicated that both parties were able to change perceived differences by empathically connecting to their disputant. These results correlated with the research specified by Johnson, Johnson, Dudley, and Acikgoz (1994). When the students in this case example were listening to each other empathically and subsequently reflecting their disputants' point of view, they naturally became less defensive. Perhaps their defenses declined, in view of the fact that, each participant felt as though her disputant understood her. As understanding progressively increased, defensiveness progressively decreased. As this happened, they were further capable of being sincere in

addition to taking into consideration the humanness of the person they once perceived as their adversary. In this case example, both participants discovered that, at the core, they had similarities that ultimately created a new friendship.

In the review of the literature, Guerney (1977) indicated that when using the Relationship Enhancement Model, people begin to increase their confidence levels in dealing with conflict. This was true for one participant in the case study, yet the other participants' results demonstrated that she felt less confident in resolving conflict. Perhaps she felt less confident in resolving personal conflicts because she had just learned a new way to resolve conflict that she was not familiar with yet. It would be interesting to give this topic closer examination.

I would recommend that this program be implemented for students in their freshman and sophomore years of high school. In addition, administrators seem to have a great deal of contact with students who are in dispute. I would recommend that this empathy-based conflict resolution program be taught to administrators as well as the school counselors. This may be able to be taught to counselors and administrators during a teachers-conference day or a workshop could be created in the summer before the school year starts.

One topic that needs closer examination is the number of participants. This research was conducted on one case example. It would be interesting to see the results of thirty or more case examples. Also, there is the chance that the students filled out the questionnaire in a positive light to please the researcher because they knew that the researcher would be looking at their answers. Another area to look at is how to market

more students to participate in the conflict resolution program, especially students who are past their sophomore year.

The researchers personal biases may have been a factor. For example, the researcher may have unconsciously demonstrated her hope that the conflict resolution program would work, in turn, the participants may have demonstrated their success to please the researcher.

Overall, I am impressed with the success of this empathy-based conflict resolution case. Before the study transpired, I perceived conflict resolution to be a good thing that would help disputant's understand each other. After conducting the conflict resolution sessions, I have a different perspective. I was astounded by how emotionally charged these participants were and how quickly they began to open to each other up once they realized that their disputant was listening to them. Also, it felt uncomfortable for me to be in a room with two people who were in conflict and not attempt to smooth it over myself. It was daunting as well as gratifying to trust the participants to resolve the conflict without offering my advice. When they accomplished a resolution through understanding each other, I realized that these students had it within them. I started to speculate whether other professionals wanted to smooth over conflict, as I did. At the end of this research study, I passionately believe that teaching students how to empathically communicate is critical in order to increase their confidence in constructively dealing with conflict on their own, increase the quality of their relationships and ultimately, increase the quality of their lives.

The review of the literature as well as the results of this study demonstrated that when participants were taught how to empathize with each other, conflict was naturally

resolved for the reason that students were able to understand each other at a deeper level.

This empathy-based conflict resolution program was successful, as we all have a voice,

and it is our human nature to want to be listened to and understood. When this happens,

walls of defensiveness break down and we are more capable of viewing each other for

who we really are.

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Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C

Appendix D

Appendix E

Appendix F