An Examination of the Similarities and Differences
between Conflict Resolution Program
at a Public Elementary School and
a Democratic-Based, Private Elementary School

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Joanna E. Binsfeld
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and a Democratic-Based, Private Elementary School

By
Joanna E. Binsfeld

has been approved for
The Center for International Studies

Jaylynne N. Hutchinson
Associate Professor of Cultural Studies in Education
Department of Educational Studies

Josep Rota
Director, Center for International Studies

An Examination of the Similarities and Differences between

Conflict Resolution Programs at a Public Elementary School

and a Democratic-Based Private Elementary School (pp. 71)

Director of Thesis: Jaylynne N. Hutchinson

Abstract:

This thesis is an examination of conflict resolution programs at a public elementary school and a democratic-based, private elementary school. The particular focus is examining the similarities of the conflict resolution programs, the differences of the programs and finally the teachers’ attitudes towards the programs. There were four means of collecting research: classroom/school observations, questionnaires disseminated to the teachers at each school, document analysis, and interviews.

Approved: Jaylynne N. Hutchinson

Associate Professor of Cultural Studies in Education
Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

“An epidemic of violence has exploded in the hallways of America’s public schools. Brutal teasing, random shootings, acts of intimidation and senseless hate crimes permeate the climate of many schools in America”

- Lucrecia Collins (qtd. in Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin 2003)

Unfortunately, many schools have become dangerous, intimidating places for teachers and students alike. Consider some of these alarming statistics compiled by a 2002 national study titled “Youth Violence: Students Speak Out for a More Civil Society” that polled 1,000 youth in fifth through twelfth grades, revealing various ways that violence has a direct impact on young people. The study concludes that 60% of the students reported they had been teased in a “mean way”. Over 57% of the students admitted teasing or gossiping about peers, 32% has been bullied and 23% had done the bullying. Besides this emotional trauma many of the students have endured physical abuse as well. Of the students polled, 46% report that they had been kicked, hit, shoved or tripped at least once. Even more alarming, 37% of the students had inflicted injuries on others, 8% had been attacked with a weapon and 8% had been sexually assaulted.

These finding are not very surprising considering that the rate of teenage homicides and suicides have tripled within a single generation. In fact, young people between the ages of 12 and 24 are more likely to be targets of violence
than any other age group (Collins 17-18). Recent data on youth violence, both in and outside of the classroom, establish the need for a way to deal with conflict in a positive way. Perhaps surprisingly, 66% of U.S. high school students who fought reported their most recent physical fight was with an acquaintance or family member, illustrating that a great deal of “violence occurs in the context of personal relationships” (Bodine and Crawford xiv). This violence makes it apparent that conflict occurs in both the school setting and in personal relationships, illustrating the utmost importance of learning healthy ways to deal with conflict.

Conflict resolution education is a key component in teaching students there are legitimate alternatives to violence while developing the importance of cooperation, empathy, problem solving, and relationship skills. If students do not feel safe at school it is extremely difficult to learn, making an unproductive environment both for students and teachers. Therefore, many school administrators in public, private and/or democratic schools realize that in order to offset this negative environment a conflict resolution program should be established to teach the students positive ways to approach their conflict. Ultimately, educators hope that these positive behaviors, which are consistently used in the school, will become internalized and utilized in other life contexts (Bodine and Crawford 4).

Conflict resolution is also a skill that is extremely important when living in a society with divergent viewpoints. In a democracy such as the US, when people express their own opinions problems can be created if people do not understand
how to work together while respecting their opposing viewpoints. At times, it is imperative to utilize skills of negotiation, compromise, while other times call for skills such as respect, trust and listening. Some would argue that the school system has to be the beginning in teaching democratic citizens. Schools are a fitting place because children enter the education system during their formative years and can learn constructive implications of a democratic society. More importantly, democratic tendencies learned at an early age will become more easily internalized.

John Dewey, academic scholar, researcher and theorist, was one of the most vocal proponents of introducing democracy in the schools. Dewey believed “education comes through the situations in which the student finds himself (sic). Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a democracy…looking at the welfare of the group” (Dewey 93). Current educators often reinforce Dewey’s ideas. For instance, in “Teaching Conflict and Conflict Resolution in School” Bickmore wrote “the handling of conflict is a guiding principle of democracy” (235). Students learn the skills, values, and characteristics necessary to engage in democracy when they are able to:

- Learn about conflict resolution
- Learn about the power and problem solving by contributing to a service project
- Learn about peacemaking (defined as confrontation with conflict, opportunities to make informed decisions)
- Serve as peer facilitators and conflict mediators
• Learn about analyzing multiple perspectives on public questions by studying problems of war, peace or any controversial issues (236)

One can deduce that conflict resolution is not only imperative for problem solving, but also for private schools, public schools and society as a whole.

Statement of Problem

The researcher will investigate the similarities and differences between two elementary schools that identify themselves as having a conflict resolution program. By researching two different schools it will allow the researcher to examine how the schools’ respective policies and climate play a role in conflict resolution and the types of conflict resolution program in their schools. The researcher will investigate the characteristics of the school that may lead to a stronger conflict resolution program.

School Background

According to Bodine and Crawford, the elements of the educational mission in America are first and foremost safety, followed by environments that foster cooperation and learning (3). However, how schools deal with these elements vary a great deal. My research in this study will take place in two different schools, both located in a rural small town of a mid-western state. One school identifies as a democratic-based independent elementary school (Stream Crest)¹ and the other is a public elementary school (Armus Elementary)².

¹ Names have been changed to ensure anonymity
² Names have been changed to protect identity
Stream Crest is a small, democratic elementary school with approximately fifty students and six teachers. The school is a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools and works closely with other progressive educators across the country. They pride themselves on “learning across disciplines through themes, meaning broadly defined topics that children explore over an extended period of time” (2). The school is private, and tuition is paid on a sliding scale in order to attract more lower-income students. However, many of the students are children of professionals, especially university professors/administrators, as the town hosts a mid-size public university. Stream Crest is divided into four multi-age classrooms and fosters cooperative learning. The school is democratically based with daily morning meetings that serve as a forum for community and consensus building, and classroom democracy. During these meetings, children discuss rules for behavior and discuss ways to resolve recent problems and conflict. A common theme reiterated at the meetings and in the school overall is the need to “use words.” The school is designed to stimulate and engage Gardner’s seven intelligences (linguistic, intrapersonal, kinesthetic, musical, spatial, logical, and interpersonal). The school has adopted Gardner’s seven intelligences into their conflict resolution education as well (“Stream Crest Handbook”). Two of Gardner’s intelligences are especially emphasized in their program – intra and interpersonal skills.

As far as a designated conflict management plan, the idea is to “foster an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, where children and adults alike are aware of each other as beings with feelings, personal limits and dignity. This is
modeled by the adults in the school, toward each other and toward the children” (“Stream Crest Handbook” 6). The school promotes pro-social skills by setting realistic limits for the children based on individual needs. When acts of aggression do occur, on-the-spot training takes place. Children and adults are asked to share their feelings face to face. Repeated occurrences often require one-on-one conferences with the teacher to try to further understand the conflict. Occasionally, removing a student from the classroom is the most viable option. Parents generally are asked to participate in solving problems. Ultimately the goals of Stream Crest’s conflict management program include:

a) Stop the offending behavior and help resolve the immediate conflict

b) Give students tools for resolving future conflicts by teaching them to talk about feelings and to listen to the feelings of others.

c) Teach strategies which help students to prevent and manage future conflicts. (“Stream Crest” 12)

In contrast, Armus Elementary is a larger public elementary school serving a small rural community, about 20 minutes away from Stream Crest. The school is substantially bigger than Stream Crest with approximately 350 students and 30 full-time faculty. Reflective of Armus Elementary school district, the school’s population is mainly composed of lower-middle class families. Armus’ mission includes “making our school a place where children learn about and experience the world around them. We believe our students can become knowledgeable, active participants in society through the individual student, learning climate,
citizenship skills and involvement of the family and community” ("Armus Handbook" 2).

Armus Elementary promotes citizenship, “preparing students to be active and responsible citizens of a global community…opportunities for students to participate in cooperative interaction, problem solving and decision-making. Through these experiences students will gain an appreciation of individuals rights, respect for rules, group responsibility and a regard for different cultures” ("Armus Handbook" 3). In correlation to citizenship, Armus also has a conflict resolution program, consisting of peer mediation, a website, classroom instruction, and just recently (March 2004) received a two-year grant of $13,000 to continue their conflict resolution initiatives. This grant is going to assist in creating a comprehensive school management program, focusing on four key areas: curriculum, pedagogy, school climate and students. (Mays Interview 3/18/04)

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study seeks to examine the conflict resolution programs in a public elementary school and a private, democratic based school. The research questions in this thesis are as follows:

- What are the differences in the conflict resolution programs at the public elementary school and the independent, progressive elementary school?
- What are the similarities in the conflict resolution programs at these two schools?

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3 Richard Mays Interview – name has been changed
What are the teachers’ attitudes towards the conflict resolution programs at these schools?

The researcher hypothesizes the teachers at Stream Crest are more receptive to conflict resolution. In addition to this receptiveness, it is hypothesized that children at Stream Crest will be more apt to use conflict resolution.

Purpose of the Study

This study provides a contribution to understanding the potential efficacy of conflict resolution programs. There has been a great deal of research published about conflict and conflict resolution in schools. However, the researcher is examining if the school philosophy (i.e. democratic-based) has a direct impact on the effectiveness of conflict resolution in the schools. There is little comparative work published examining conflict resolution in democratic–based schools and non-democratic based schools. For this thesis, it is imperative to have a working definition of democratic-based schools, sometimes referred to as progressive schools⁴. The schools generally share most or all of the following characteristics, although there is no exact definition or requirement for a democratic school:

- Shared decision-making among the students and staff
- Equality among staff and students
- Learner-center approach where students have a more vocal voice in their daily activities

⁴ After various discussions, the researcher has refrained from using the word progressive when speaking of the democratic-based school. Using the term progressive implies schools which do not identify as democratic-based can not be progressive in their leadership and ideas to implement in the school
• The community as an extension to the classroom


In contrast, a public school can be defined as a tuition-free elementary, middle or high school maintained by the local government for children of a community or district. Generally speaking, public schools adhere to decisions made by the district. Public schools comply with state and federal laws in regards to standardized testing, the school calendar, and policies set by the school board.

Limitations

This study has three significant limitations caused by the nature of the timeline of my work. First, this study could prove more informative if the researcher could disseminate questionnaires to students, as well as teachers as is the case in this thesis. Due to the constraints of completing this thesis in within this academic year, I can only examine the similarities and differences that exist at that time. Second, interviews of the students would also result in many intriguing ideas, for example, how do the children, at both schools respectively, interpret conflict and their ability to handle conflict effectively. Due to the limitations of time based on the academic calendar for the researcher, interviewing students would prove too time costly due to parental consent and increased IRB clearance hence students will not be a focus of this study. Finally, the size of the schools being researched vary, Armus Elementary has 350 students while Stream Crest has 50 students. By researching schools that differ this much in size makes a comparative study more difficult to conduct.
Delimitations

This thesis was limited to two elementary schools in a small rural town in Ohio. The schools were chosen because of their varying dynamics, one being a public school and the other a democratic-based elementary school and their close proximity to the researcher. In addition, both schools actively use a form of conflict resolution education. Each school has shown interest in participating and genuine intrigue into this type of study.

Definition of Terms

Conflict: “Disagreement resulting from incompatible demands between or among two or more parties” (Mauer 1). “An expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards or resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals.” (Duryea 5).

Conflict Management: Programs that teach individuals concepts and skills for preventing, managing, and peacefully resolving concepts (“Conflict Management Program” 2).

Conflict Resolution Program: Focuses on teaching strategies for managing interpersonal conflict more constructively (Campbell 148).

Pedagogy: Activities that inpart knowledge, art or profession of teaching (“Conflict Management Program” 1).

Peer Mediation: Refers to the practice of training students to act as neutral facilitators in the resolution process with their peers (Campbell 148).
Organization

Chapter one provides an introduction and background to the issues of conflict resolution education. Chapter two examines current literature published in the field of conflict resolution, exploring various theories and techniques of managing conflict. The third chapter describes the research methodology and data analysis by examining some of the qualitative and quantitative approaches utilized. Chapter four discusses data collected and examines the similarities and differences of the conflict resolution program. Chapter five concludes with recommendations for practice and future studies.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

“The greatest risk of conflicts for young people is that, unaware, they become locked into a pattern of deficient and extreme responses to the inevitable interpersonal friction that they face. Because conflicts can be very threatening, and because there is but little peer input to understand them, students engage in ritualized posturing and fail to explore other, more productive responses. Because conflicts are so absorbing and important to them, their experience and interest is a resource that they could exploit to learn new ways of behaving. But to do so, they need help…Without adult input, it is difficult to develop the vocabulary, concepts, insight, and skills to deal with conflict in a flexible and constructive way.”

– Susan Opotow (qtd. in “Ohio”)

All too frequently students in the United States are filing through the school system never being exposed to one of the most essential tools to take with them into adulthood – how to handle conflict in a practical, effective manner. Young people develop many of their beliefs and behaviors by observing the actions of adults and peers. Conflict resolution strategies are no exceptions. Therefore children, being mirrors and sponges of the adult society, handle conflict in the traditional ways most adults do: fight or flight. Often the fight (attack) or flight (avoidance) responses allow the conflict to remain unresolved or
to escalate into a more serious dispute (“Ohio” 8). The old “traditional” ways of handling conflict have made U.S schools dangerous and intimidating places, thereby creating the need to initiate partnerships that are reforming these schools. According to the U.S. Department of Education in 2002, students aged between 12 and 18 were victims of 2.7 million crimes at school. The purpose of this literature review is to examine theories related to conflict, look at definitions of conflict and conflict resolutions plans, and finally investigate programs implemented currently.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Conflict Resolution

According to Sweeney and Carruthers in “Conflict Resolution: History, Philosophy, Theory, and Educational Application” schools in the United States have endured a long evolution of discipline practices. During colonial times, educators adopted traditions from the churches accepting that children were morally corrupt and needed strong authoritative figures to correct these flaws. The teacher’s ultimate responsibility was maintaining student discipline. Some of the more extreme discipline practices included placing wood in a talkative student’s mouth, six pound logs were attached to the heads of fidgety students, while dunce caps and leg shackles were more humane treatments used to promote obedience.

However by the early 1800s, European educators began to take lead in advocating teachers adopt less dangerous, demeaning strategies related to student conduct. Academics at the time, such as Pestalozzi and Durkheim, suggested children should be seen as people thereby treated humanely. With
the efforts of American scholars William McClure and Henry Barnard this positive view of children spread to the United States. The more humane treatment was utilized from that point forward.

Sweeney and Carruthers go on to say that by the 1970s the idea of students helping students began to take heed. This new concept was based on research conducted during the latter part of the 1960s evidencing peer groups develop social responsibility. Along with the increased support of peer groups, the modern view of student discipline shifted from punitive measures to constructive behavior. Sweeney and Carruthers reference the work of Johnson, Johnson, Dudley and Burnett (1982) to support the idea of the continuum of conflict resolution in the education system. One end focused on the faculty and staff controlling and managing student behavior while the other end focused on students regulating their conflict and the conflict of their peers (5).

Sweeney and Carruthers continue by examining the ideas and theories behind conflict resolution programs. Many educational theorists and practitioners do not underestimate the power of conflict. A basic assumption is that conflict is a natural part of life (Deutsch, 1983; Kreidler, 1984; Martin and Holder, 1994). Koch and Miller pointed out that controversy and conflict are a natural part of children’s maturation and socialization. However, Follet (1924) is credited with being the first to introduce and describe the philosophical base for conflict resolution practices. The principles are described in four parts: conflict is an evolving experience – not static, parties in conflict are cocreators of the conflict and each has some responsibility in its solution, parties with different interests
need to confront each other, and finally win-win solutions are possible in which all parties benefit from the conflict resolution process. Although Follet was the first to introduce conflict resolution philosophies much of her work is based on John Dewey’s work.

Dewey’s ideas pertaining to education often centered around reforms to education during the last part of the 19th and first part of the 20th centuries. According to Sweeney and Carruthers, one of Dewey’s main reforms was student discipline. Dewey believed school should be a social, scientific and, as mentioned in chapter one, democratic place. “He encouraged teachers to offer students opportunities for social participation…school was a place for cooperative and collaborative inquiry, not authoritarian rule. He understood conflict was a necessity for growth (Kleinholz 125). In Dewey’s *Experience and Education*, he championed democratic schools, suggesting a true democracy is “not the will or desire of any one person…but the moving spirit of the entire group” (Dewey 92). Dewey’s support of democracy, especially in the school has led to a whole movement of democratic based schools. These schools promote a participatory democracy, meaning “a democracy that calls upon men and women to build communities where opportunities and resources are available for every individual to fully realize their capabilities through participation in political, social, and cultural life” (89).

In contrast to Dewey, other practitioners view conflict to be less societal but more interpersonal. For instance, Campbell in “The Efficacy of Conflict-

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5 To reiterate definition of democratic schools are important for this work, as Stream Crest is a democratic school.
Mediation Training in Elementary Schools" introduces some conflict resolution programs that theorize it is imperative to begin with activities that enhance students’ knowledge of interpersonal conflict. Some of these activities include active listening skills, role-playing and raising social conscience (149). Campbell goes on to reiterate that interpersonal conflict is an uncomfortable subject for many people. Personality, culture, and life experience all shape the ways students handle conflict. Therefore, students need a foundation to communicate and address their differences. She concludes with the detrimental effects of unresolved conflicts emphasizing conflict that occurs in the school must be addressed within the same context. Students who experience unresolved school-based conflict reject their school experience creating a diminished interest in academics and the possibility of creating a habit of dysfunctional relationships (Campbell 150-151).

**Conflict Resolution Programs**

According to Johnson and Johnson in *Reducing School Violence through Conflict Resolution*, before students are introduced to conflict resolution training most students are found to be involved in conflicts daily. The conflicts reported most frequently include teasing, physical aggression, and put downs. Before training, students referred their conflicts to the teacher while using destructive strategies which often escalated the conflict (Bodine et. al 406-407). Many theorists confirm, conflict carries a very powerful opportunity to stimulate learning so it is vital that school systems implement conflict resolution programs and
policies that allow the student to learn positive behavior in a non-judgmental environment.

According to Maxwell, school based conflict resolution is derived from developments that occurred in the 1970s and 80s. These developments include a Quaker project started in New York City schools to teach nonviolence in 1972, establishment of Educators for Social Responsibility in 1981 and lastly the founding of the National Association for Mediation in Education in 1984. When most authors write about conflict resolution in general they note conflict resolution is a recent concept typically describe a process of settling disagreements (Sweeney and Carruthers 326).

As Bodine and Crawford illustrate in “The Handbook of Conflict Resolution Education: A Guide to Building Quality Programs in Schools” a conflict resolution program is a general term that covers negotiation, mediation, peer mediation, and collaborative problem solving. A school conflict resolution program includes:

- an understanding of conflict
- principles of conflict resolution
- steps in problem solving (i.e. agreeing to negotiate, gathering information about the conflict, exploring possible solution options)
- active listening, factoring into the process the impact that cultural differences have on the dispute, all skills required to use the steps in an effective manner (Bodine and Crawford xv).

Bodine and Crawford go on to reiterate the pedagogy of conflict resolution is based on building a foundation of problem solving. Students can practice
applying new conflict resolution problem solving skills in the classroom through special lessons or by infusing it into the curriculum; this can include role playing, class meetings, or shared governance. Ultimately, a conflict resolution program succeeds when a student has explored definitions of conflict, observed conflict situations, and gained understanding as to what causes conflict (what causes it to escalate/de-escalate, and understand the influence of unresolved conflicts from the past). Quality conflict resolution programs introduce the tools to think systematically and critically about conflict while ensuring the lessons are age appropriate (Bodine and Crawford 10, Bodine et. al 118). Of equal importance is ensuring a program is a good fit for the school. A program should be "philosophically sound" based on theory and grounded in instructional methods (Bodine et. al 82).

Examples of Programs

One such program that is gaining national attention is the Ohio’s School Conflict Management Initiative established as a joint partnership between the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management in 1994 (“Ohio” 1). The program is described is outlined in a 500+ page “Ohio Dept. of Education and the Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management” manual. The mission of this coalition is based on four principles:

1. Conflict is a natural and normal part of living.
2. Conflict can be dealt with in positive and negative ways.
3. Students are responsible and can solve their own problems.
4. Students can find peaceful solutions to their problems. ("Ohio" 8)

With these four principles guiding the coalition they are able to assist teachers and faculty members to incorporate this ideology in their classroom and school settings respectively. The coalition introduces the faculty to class management styles as a way of determining what their desired classroom management goals are, as displayed below:

Table 1: Cooperative Discipline Implementation Guide by Linda Albert, 1996. (qtd. in “Ohio” 26).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hands-On</th>
<th>Hands-Off</th>
<th>Hands-Joined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limits without freedom</td>
<td>Freedom without limits</td>
<td>Freedom within limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Powerlessness</td>
<td>Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher in Charge</td>
<td>No one in Charge</td>
<td>All in charge of their own behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No choices</td>
<td>Too many choices</td>
<td>Structured choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commanding and Demanding</td>
<td>Wishing and hoping</td>
<td>Inviting and encouraging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands obedience</td>
<td>Invites responsibility</td>
<td>Fosters responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little respect for students</td>
<td>Little respect for teachers</td>
<td>Mutual respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER-student: climate tense and fearful</td>
<td>Teacher – STUDENT: climate unstable and chaotic</td>
<td>TEACHER – STUDENT: climate orderly and relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result: Defiance and hostility</td>
<td>Result: Confusion and Chaos</td>
<td>Result: Cooperation and collaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the classroom management styles are discussed, students are then able to practice applying new conflict management skills in the classroom through specials lessons or by infusing conflict management into the entire...
curriculum. Generally this is a four-part lesson. First, students will explore the definitions of conflict. Then, the students will examine the levels of conflict, followed by observing situations where conflict is diffused which helps the students gain an understanding as to what causes conflict. At that point the students can examine what causes it to escalate or deescalate and finally the consequences of conflicts that go unresolved. (“Ohio” 10).

According to Palmer in “Conflict Resolution: Strategies for the Elementary Classroom” Ohio’s initiatives are designed to educate the students about distributive versus integrative negotiations. Distributive negotiation approaches conflict by winning or benefiting at the expense of the other party. Traditional conflict ends with “winners” and “losers”. The winner/loser outcome generally does not resolve the conflict. According to Drew (1988) it is possible for both parties to win if at least one party involved in the conflict is truly committed to bringing about a peaceful solution, integrative negotiations (Palmer 66). These integrative negotiations focus on reaching a mutually agreeable solution that respects both parties, a win/win experience. As Palmer describes the “win/win” experience is composed of seven guidelines:

1. Each person states the problem as he or she sees it.
2. Take time out for cooling off. Find alternative ways to express anger.
3. Each person states his or her feelings, using “I messages.” Do not make negative remarks about the other person, or place blame, or refer to past situations.
4. Each person states the problem as the other person sees it.
5. Brainstorm solutions together.
6. Choose a solution that satisfies both partners – a win/win solution.

Most students who have never been exposed to conflict resolution engage in distributive negotiation to resolve conflict, whereas students who have been exposed to conflict resolution programs naturally migrate towards integrative negotiations. This latter type of negotiation is undoubtedly more pleasant for both parties involved. “This is the genius of conflict resolution skills….it equips the young people with effective strategies to deal with interpersonal conflicts independently, eventually free from authority figures” (Collins 151).

According to Fisher and Ury, authors of *Getting to Yes* and dispute resolution consultants, integrative negotiations are premised on the idea of separating interests from positions. Reconciling interests rather than positions is recommended by most dispute resolution professionals. Fisher and Ury believe “behind opposed positions often lay compatible interests” (42). Lessons about issues and positions allow students to gain a better understanding about the conflict, while teaching the students they are not in conflict with the person but rather the interests.

These types of negotiations mentioned above, which are interwoven into the curriculum, are designed to lessen the added stresses and responsibilities teachers are being faced with in the classroom. One of the most difficult realities teachers are currently facing is escalation of roles and responsibilities. Teachers’ responsibilities have gone beyond the realm of teaching the three Rs to include
responsibilities such as observing students for escalating emotional problems (Campbell 150). In the future, programs like the one adopted in Ohio, will become more commonplace to offset some of these increased roles and responsibilities.

Another practice used to address conflict is the one crafted by The Handbook of Conflict Resolution Education by Bodine and Crawford. This handbook’s philosophy differs from the prevalent practices for managing conflict used in many schools currently such as the one described in the Ohio manual. As Bodine and Crawford illustrate, conflict resolution is a collaborative process in which those with ownership of the problem participate directly in crafting a solution to the problem, with or without involvement of others, illustrated in the following table:
Table 2: Bodine and Crawford’s Approach

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevalent Practices</th>
<th>Conflict Resolution</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relies on a third party to settle disputes</td>
<td>Directly involves the conflicting parties in both resolution process and outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactively offers services after the conflict occurs</td>
<td>Proactively offers skills and strategies to participants prior to their involvement in the conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on conflict after a school rule has been broken; often offers advice to ignore problem if it is thought not to major or serious</td>
<td>Intervenes in conflicts and prevents their escalation into the broken-rule stage or into violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses arbitration almost exclusively to settle disputes</td>
<td>Maximizes the use of negotiation and mediation processes to resolve disputes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requires adults to spend a disproportionate amount of time dealing with minor student conflicts</td>
<td>Uses teacher and virtually unlimited student resources to handle such conflicts and learn essential decision making skills in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relies on disciplinary codes that are ineffective at helping students reconcile interpersonal and intergroup differences</td>
<td>Focuses attention not on disciplinary offense but on how to resolve interpersonal and intergroup dimensions of a conflict</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Bodine and Crawford 48).

Peer Mediation

Another successful form of conflict resolution is utilizing peer mediation.

According to Guanci in “Peer Mediation: A Winning Solution to Conflict Resolution” surprisingly, peer mediation originated in government. During President Carter’s term he conceived the idea of having Neighborhood Justice Centers, later commonly known as Community Mediation Programs, where neighbors would go to have issues mediated. As a result of this program’s success, schools attempted to duplicate the Community Mediation Programs
(Guanci 26). Many education experts have long been in favor of peer mediation. Benson and Benson (1994) found peer mediation programs merit consideration due to the myriad of positive results. These results include a reduction of administrators and teachers' time in dealing with conflict, a decrease in school violence, enhancement of self-esteem and excelled academic performance (Guanci 27).

In contrast, according to Johnson and Johnson in “Effects of Conflict Resolution Training on Elementary School Students” there has been surprisingly little evidence gathered on long-term gains of peer mediation programs. Johnson and Johnson are not downplaying the positive outcomes derived from peer mediation, they are stating that how children learn to manage conflicts with peers in a constructive manner is not well researched. They go on to say that the practitioners’ interest in peer mediation has recently began warranting further studies of the effectiveness. Due to lack of published results, Johnson and Johnson began to conduct their own research and preliminarily concluded mediation supports student learning skills for problem solving and decision-making. They will conduct further research to look at some long-term implications of peer mediation.

For the sake of this thesis and ultimately to gain a better understanding of peer mediation, the case study presented by Guanci exemplifies a peer mediation program from idea to inception.
Case Study: Peer Mediation at the Comprehensive Grammar School

In the mid-1990s, Principal Richard Raiche was very concerned about the rising rate of violence that was occurring in his grammar school. The school discussed the need to implement a peer mediation program in the school. After teachers voted in favor of the program, the planning stages were underway. Both teachers and students were encouraged to make recommendations as to whom they felt would make qualified mediators. From these recommendations the students were then encouraged to apply.

After the applications were received interviews of the qualified candidates followed with teachers and experienced mediators overseeing the process. The candidates were selected based on their interview, application, and willingness to commit to a one-year project. The final selection represented the entire school community, including at risk students. These students then participated in an intensive 18-hour training where they learned active listening, critical thinking, negotiation, and problem solving skills. Finally these students were introduced to the steps of mediation. The steps in the mediation process include:

1. *Initial intake* – the coordinator receives and reviews referral forms. The coordinator then meets with the students in conflict, answers their questions about mediation and asks if they would like to go forward with mediation. If all parties agree, the coordinator selects mediators and schedules the mediation within 24 hours.

2. *Setting the stage* – the assigned mediators describe the process, set the ground rules, answer questions and confirm the willingness to participate.
3. *Hearing the story* – each party is given the opportunity to explain their side without interruption. This is the opportunity the mediators utilize their active listening skills and summarize each party’s version of the conflict.

4. *Defining the problem* – mediators ask questions as a way to uncover feelings and clarify the conflict.

5. *Brainstorming solutions* – the mediators ask each party what they want in order to resolve the conflict. The parties often discuss possible solutions with the mediator’s assistance to negotiate.

6. *Optional private sessions* – if the parties agree, the mediator meets with each party separately to explore issues in depth and allow parties to clarify issues.

7. *Agreement writing and closing* – this step occurs when parties have been able to cordially come to an agreement to resolve their conflict. The mediator writes down terms and asks the parties to sign and finally provides a copy to each party.

8. *Follow-up* – the coordinator and/or mediator checks with the parties to ensure the agreement is working and offers assistance.

Guanci concludes by discussing the success of the Comprehensive Grammar School with their peer mediation. In the first year alone, the program had 87 successful mediations dealing with issues such as rumors, name calling, harassment, bullying and cliques. As a measure of effectiveness, suspension rates dropped from 18% to 4% through the course of the year. According to the school’s accountability survey, 78% of the student body reported the program had been successful and 64% felt it improved school climate (Guanci 27-33).
Critiques of Conflict Resolution Education

Even the best intentions regarding conflict resolution may not be teaching the students effective conflict resolutions. According to Bickmore in “Teaching Conflict and Conflict Resolution in School” violence prevention and antibullying programs generally involve narrowly focused “training” in social skills and anger management. This training is generally supplemented by stricter punishment and/or increased staff monitoring responsibilities. For example, Bickmore states that many schools in North America, specifically Canada and the United States, have recently implemented “zero tolerance” policies. Bickmore concludes by showing the faults that lie in the zero tolerance policies that blame and exclude the identified “perpetrators” of violence from school.

Even when there is truly a recognized need for educating students in nonviolent problem solving, educators often lack knowledge about conflict resolution and effective implementation of conflict resolution education programs. Similar to Bickmore, Bodine and Crawford also believe conflict resolution programs can be designed to promote greater success. For example, students have conflict with parents, teachers, school administrators, employers, and neighbors; educators who implement conflict resolution education programs addressing only conflict among students limit the impact of these programs. This deprives school faculty, students, families, and the larger community of opportunities to develop and practice conflict resolution skills in areas where there is a desperate need for growth (Bodine and Crawford 20). However, as
Bodine and Crawford illustrate the positives of conflict resolution are endless, but ultimately require a life long journey.

**Goals of Conflict Resolution**

Learning conflict resolution takes place in four distinct stages, or as Bodine and Crawford introduce, the circle of learning (118). Learning is a circular process, moving through all four stages. The stages are described as the following: *unconsciously unskilled* – being unaware of what one does not know, *consciously unskilled* – being aware of what is not known, however recognizing the need to grow and develop further, *consciously skilled* – being able to perform but doing so with great attention and effort, and lastly *unconsciously skilled* – performing competently and almost automatically. The goal of quality conflict programs is the desire to make students, of all ages, unconsciously skilled.

**Conclusion**

As evidenced by this literature review, there is a great deal of published work about conflict resolution in schools and many aspects to consider. However, there is a substantial void when discussing how the environment, philosophy and style of school impacts the conflict resolution program. Hence the study is of importance to compare and contrast conflict resolution in various school settings.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Research Design

The researcher, a graduate student in International Development, seeks to investigate the particular differences and similarities between conflict resolution programs at a public elementary school and a democratic-based elementary school. In addition to the similarities and differences, the research will examine teachers’ attitudes toward the conflict resolution program and their preparation to handle conflict in an effective manner.

This research takes place in three stages. The first stage consists of classroom observations at both schools where I spend time in each school for 7 weeks throughout January and February 2004. During the observation stage, questionnaires will be disseminated to all faculty regarding the conflict resolution program at their school. The final part of data collection is document analysis, conducted after questionnaires have been returned to the researcher. This analysis will explore the schools’ policies and mission statements regarding conflict resolution policies and programs.

Subject Population

The primary subject population in this research consists of the faculty at both elementary schools. The research will not consider gender, age, or racial backgrounds. The respondents are chosen on their interest in completing the questionnaire and signing an official Ohio University letter of consent (see Appendix B).
**Instruments and Data Collection**

The instruments for this study include the attached questionnaire (see Appendix A), which was designed specifically for this project by the researcher. This questionnaire has three varying components. The first component is a Likert-scale format where respondents can record answers on a continuum from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The second part of the questionnaire consists of simple yes/no answers, and the final part is qualitative in nature with the respondents able to answer short, open-ended questions.

**Data Analysis**

The data collection process will involve A) questionnaires, B) observations and C) document analysis.

**A. Questionnaire Analysis**

The questionnaire results will be gathered and organized in a manner to determine the overall similarities and differences regarding the conflict resolution programs. The first six questions on the questionnaire are in Likert format where the respondents may choose answers which vary from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The responses will be tabulated to determine the mean for each question. The second section of the questionnaire is simple yes/no answers. This section will be statistically break down the percentage of teachers reply yes/no. Finally, the last section are open-ended questions that will be coded to see if there are similarities among the teachers in each school and then compared with the teachers from the other school. The analysis will look for themes in the data collected from the questionnaire.
B. Classroom Observation

“The term observation and in particular participant observation is usually used to refer to methods of generating data which involve the researcher immersing himself/herself in a research setting, and systematically observing dimensions of that setting, interactions, relationships, event” (Mason 61). The basis of Mason’s idea underlies my observations in the two classrooms. This will allow the researcher to observe activities, events, and relationships that the questionnaire might not illustrate, or it may confirm the data generated by the questionnaires.

The classroom observation component will utilize a qualitative approach to research collection. The researcher will utilize grounded theory. Grounded theory, defined by Emerson as:

“a set of inductive strategies for analyzing data….start with individual cases, incidents or experiences and develop progressively more abstract conceptual categories to synthesize, to explain and to understand data and to identify partnered relationships within it. You begin with an area to study. Then, you build your theoretical analysis on what you discover is relevant in the actual worlds that you study within this area” (335).

The steps of grounded theory are data collection, followed by coding of the data, which results in theory emerging from the data. Ultimately, employing grounded theory will produce rich, detailed data useful in evaluating the conflict resolution programs at these two schools.
C. Document Analysis

Finally, the document analysis will examine the respective schools’ policies regarding conflict and conflict resolution plans in their student handbooks. This will give the researcher the opportunity to see how closely policy and practice match regarding conflict resolution plans. The documents analyzed will be handbooks distributed to the students and their families, no confidential material will be examined for this thesis project.
Chapter 4

Analysis

This study was designed to examine the similarities and differences in conflict resolution programs at Armus Elementary, the public elementary school, and Stream Crest, the democratic-based school. The chapter will first compare teachers’ perceptions of their conflict resolution plans at the respective schools, followed by the differences, similarities and ultimately recommendations for both schools.

Teachers’ perceptions were measured by the first part of the questionnaires. The scale was composed of six statements on a Likert style survey. Teachers were asked to rank their responses from strongly disagree to strongly agree, each response was tabulated and assigned a value from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). As far as the sample size, Armus had a total of 13 respondents (a 43% questionnaire return rate) whereas Stream Crest had 6 respondents (a 100% return rate). The following table compares the calculated means from Armus Elementary and Stream Crest:
Table 3: Comparison of the Calculated Means
(1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

1) We have an effective Conflict Resolution Program in our school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armus</th>
<th>Stream Crest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Conflict Resolution is integrated into different parts of the curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armus</th>
<th>Stream Crest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) Conflict Resolution is an important part of my job responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armus</th>
<th>Stream Crest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) Teacher/faculty members are given adequate preparation to carry out Conflict Resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armus</th>
<th>Stream Crest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5) Conflict Resolution has been effective in handling most conflict that arises in my classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armus</th>
<th>Stream Crest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6) In student/student conflict, students are more likely to solve the problem among themselves rather than getting a teacher to help in the problem solving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armus</th>
<th>Stream Crest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at question one, you can interpret that teachers at Stream Crest (with a mean of 4.5) agree that their school has an effective conflict resolution program compared to Armus (with a mean of 4.18). Stream Crest has a higher mean for all six responses, ranging from agreeing conflict resolution is an

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Note: Due to the variation in amount collected from each school (six from Stream Crest, thirteen from Armus) there can not be a direct comparison but a general theme can be discussed.
important part of their job responsibilities to asserting conflict resolution has been effective in handling most conflict that arises in their classroom.

The following two tables show how many respondents from each school (Stream Crest followed by Armus Elementary) selected strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree.

**Table 4**
**Teachers’ attitudes about conflict resolution programs in their school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stream Crest</th>
<th>Item #1</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5
Teachers’ attitudes about conflict resolution programs in their respective school

Armus Elementary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #1</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>SA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These tables can be easily compared. For example, in Table 2, three teachers at Stream Creast agree with question one (We have an effective Conflict Resolution Program in our school) while three teachers strongly agree. In comparison, when examining Table 3, three teachers at Armus are neutral, followed by seven that agree and three that strongly agree.

The second part of the questionnaire examines the types of conflict that occur in each school. The following comparative list takes an in-depth look at these conflicts, where these conflicts take place and what types of conflict resolution are implemented in each school.

For instance, Armus’ most tabulated conflict was name calling, the place where most conflict occurs, according to the questionnaire, is at recess and 11 teachers respond their conflict resolution plan addresses student to student
conflict. In comparison, Stream Crest’s most tabulated form of conflict is name calling, with most conflict occurring in the classroom, and four of the six faculty members conclude they participate in positive discipline\(^7\), specifically class meetings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Armus</th>
<th>Stream Crest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forms of conflict:</td>
<td>Forms of conflict:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(# of responses)</td>
<td>(# of responses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name calling (9)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cliques (7)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taunting (6)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying (5)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Violence (no weapon) (1)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Violence (weapon) (0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where does conflict most often occur:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recess (10)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch (5)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom (3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restrooms (1)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After school (0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your CR plan address conflict between</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Student</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Parent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Student</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your school have:</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peer Mediation</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying Prevention</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Discipline</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(classroom meetings)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^7\) Positive Discipline refers to conflict management strategies that develop peaceful behaviors. The most common form of positive discipline is the idea of classroom meetings; these meetings are forums used to discuss issues and conflicts occurring in the school (“Ohio” hand-out).
These findings will be discussed later in the chapter when the similarities and differences are identified. In completing the questionnaire, the last component was qualitative in nature. The answers were very honest and insightful, therefore all responses are included:

*Armus Elementary (Qualitative Responses)*

**What are some challenges you face regarding conflict and/or conflict resolution plan in your school currently?**

- “A challenge I face is how to keep the same few students internalize strategies to help them solve conflicts. These students are constantly in conflict with others – sometimes physically, but mainly in verbal conflict. The time allotted to these students and the conflicts they are dealing with take up a very large amount of time from learning and energy from everyone involved. I am also challenged by these students in that I am uncertain how to help them deal with their anger. Some of our students need time to meet with counselors regularly to discuss anger management and what they can do to control their behaviors which lead to consequences (which they don’t usually like).”

- “Very angry, aggressive students who are “never wrong” or “didn’t do it” with parents that call in and scream because we are picking on their child.”

- “Insensitivity to differences (student-student), trouble resolving small problems before they become big (student-student), communication (teacher-teacher).”
• “Back stabbing among staff, competition between elementary grade level teachers that have difficulty working together. Children who are leaders but not positive leaders.”

• Conflicts in my classroom include students who don’t follow rules no matter what consequences are; lack of support from parents when dealing with conflicts; anger management issues- what other strategies can kids use when things don’t go as planned? Conflicts among staff-lack of communication, only some folks know information.

  ▪ “Staff conflicts are not dealt with effectively.”

  ▪ “Implementing it successfully”

  ▪ “Remembering to actually get the plans written up and figured into the weekly schedule. I know we cover conflict resolution in kindergarten but in kindergarten it’s an hourly thing. I’ve just felt a little overwhelmed this year, but I know how important it is.”

  ▪ “I don’t really have TIME to negotiate every squabble. They can work it out themselves or I will just send them to the wall!”

  ▪ “We switch classes so frequently that it becomes more difficult to develop strong relationships among students and a sense of community.”

  ▪ “Time to teach these skills in addition to the academic skills – methods of integrating/infusing these lessons into current lessons.”

  ▪ “Apathy on the part of some teacher.”

  ▪ “None, but we probably should begin addressing bullying and teacher-teacher conflicts. The latter is the hardest to accomplish in my opinion.”
"It seems like a few people are really ‘in to it’ and some are ‘sort of trying’ and then others don’t really know what or how to get started."

Describe the effectiveness of your conflict resolution program? How could it be improved?

- "There is little for the young students. Maybe an incentive program for them."
- "The students do respect the program, but I think they do not completely understand it."
- "I believe the program is in its beginning stages and is doing well so far."
- "The mediators have been trained to work with young children and they seem to enjoy the attention."
- "More parental involvement is needed!"
- "I think things are going well and I see a lot of effort to keep the program successful. I would like to have time available to meet at grade levels (or primary and intermediate) to discuss common conflicts that arise and share strategies to best deal with the conflicts. It’s always enlightening to get strategies from other teachers. I also feel we should talk more about teacher-parent and teacher-teacher conflict."
- "It is effective in creating a harmonious school environment. It could be improved by involving bus drivers and creating a consistent base of lessons."
- "More supervision of mediators"
“Very effective, but we need to address ‘emotional’ bullying and adult conflict, including parents.

“Not very effective, it needs a good dose of ‘get on with it’.”

As an educator do you feel it better to have students solve their own conflicts (minimal disagreements/no bodily harm or violence likely to occur) rather than have adults come to the assistance of children?

Why or why not?

“I like for children to solve their own problems, but at the primary level I don’t think that students usually have enough strategies to do this without adult intervention.”

“Students need to learn how to deal with problems so they can become adults with effective strategies.”

“I feel the students respect the teacher more than the student, so the teacher would be more effective.”

“I think that an adult could be present but only as a third party to stop conflicts from escalating too far, but kids need to be given the chance to fix the problems themselves and learn early.”

“Students! I don’t have time!”

“Yes they need these skills to be successful later in life.”

“Yes, because they need to have that independence. We are not always there to solve conflicts for them and they should possess the skills and the confidence to express themselves while showing empathy. Adults should help by providing the skills that are necessary for conflict resolution. If
needed, it can be offered during the conflict, but if not, this can be focused on at another time towards the entire group.”

- “Yes students learn the skills they need to solve future problems.”
- “Students – They need to learn how to deal with their conflicts if they are to grow. It is nice to have an adult there if needed. There should be a facilitator.”
- “Personally, I would like to be involved as a third party to watch the conflicts get resolved. It is my hope that students will eventually be able to resolve issues without help.”
- “Somewhat! It just is the time involved when students try to work it out.”

Stream Crest Qualitative Responses

What are some challenges you face regarding conflict and/or conflict resolution plan in your school currently?

- “The biggest challenge in guiding children through resolving conflicts for me is when parents fail to support and/or understand the process. The staff adheres to a similar philosophy of resolving conflicts with children, but follows no ‘packaged plan’.”
- “It is hard for teachers to use it amongst themselves.”
- “Making sure that all staff implements conflict resolution consistently.”
- “It is not always used the same way at lunch with the lunch staff. Also, there should be more student directed meetings.”
Describe the effectiveness of your Conflict Resolution Program? How could it be improved?

- “I believe that over time, children enroll in our program come to expect support in working through conflicts with other children. Even those who come from other schools and have little skills in resolving conflict, over time, make significant progress in becoming part of the solution to any conflict.”
- “It is working great for kids.”
- “I think we have a phenomenal conflict resolution program”
- “Over time I have seen some children make amazing changes. If we could find a way for them to carry into the ‘real world’ I would be happier.”
- “I am very pleased with our conflict resolution process. More adults skilled in conflict resolution would definitely help.”

As an educator do you feel it is better to have students solve their own conflicts (minimal disagreements/no bodily harm or violence likely to occur) rather than have adults come to the assistance of the children? Why or why not?

- “It varies with each child, I find that some children need support, even with minor conflicts, for a longer period of time than others, much like some need help with reading skills longer than others. This is particularly true for children with inflexible, “explosive” personalities. For such children,
sometimes they are fine while some days, they are moody and require more help.”

• “Yes, so they can refine their skills.”

• “Absolutely – the goal of everything I teach is to encourage children to take responsibility for themselves and their actions.”

• “After they have the tools to do it and they are comfortable with their role, then it works. However, adults should always be available to help.”

• “It depends on the age. Young children or children unfamiliar with conflict resolution need a great deal of modeling and guidance. Then, children can begin to solve more and more of their own conflicts independently.”

Additional Feedback

• “I believe that our program places equal emphasis on resolving conflicts in and out of the classroom with that of academic subjects including reading and math.”

• “Conflicts always happen – this is a way to deal them but not always to solve them. Some kids seem to always have conflict with other certain kids. The most important point is how to deal with conflict not whether it gets solved.”

Examination of Differences

Through these questionnaires and classroom observations it can be deduced that parents play a more significant role at Stream Crest. Armus, on the other hand, realizes that parental support is more challenging. For example,
parents are hard to access. When Armus had an informative meeting about their conflict resolution program, which was advertised to all parents via the monthly newsletter, only one parent turned out.

This parental influence at Stream Crest is really imperative to its entire school and continued operation. As mentioned in Stream Crest’s handbook “Stream Crest has always relied on its families. Without the support that parents give by working on school committees, helping in the classroom and on field trips, and helping with fundraising and other special projects, Stream Crest could not continue its programs”. Stream Crest’s handbook goes on further “we ask families to contribute an average of fours hours per month as a \textit{minimum} guideline. Each family is asked to seriously consider participating in two out of three areas: classroom support, standing committees, and special projects”. However, in comparison, Armus Elementary’s handbook addresses parental involvement in the introduction. “The education of your child is a joint responsibility of the school and home. Children who come to school regularly and on time, in good health, with sufficient rest, and dressed for the weather are ready for the educational activities for the day. Parents who work closely with teachers and administrators are crucial in providing the best educational program for their child”. It is apparent through looking at the two excerpts as part of the document analysis research parents are important at each school but the expectations of time and parental involvement vary a great deal.
Stream Crest, which as mentioned earlier, is a private school often attracting university professors and professionals’ children compared to Armus Elementary. The school often reiterates the importance of using words to solve conflict, however many of these children are taught that even before going to school whereas Armus students might first be introduced to conflict resolution strategies after going to school (Mays interview). Therefore, concluding, Stream Crest may get students that are more familiar with communicating feelings and thoughts.

Stream Crest requires students and their families observe the classroom before the student can be enrolled, making sure this sort of atmosphere will benefit the student and the student understands the school and teachers’ approach. Stream Crest has the right, being a private school, to deny student admission who they think will not be a reasonable match. However, Armus does not have that discretion since it is a public school. It must accept all students regardless or whether their families agree with the school philosophy.

In a similar finding, staff that work at Stream Crest are drawn to its integral part of their philosophy. The teachers admit they accept positions there because it compliments their own personal philosophies pertaining to teaching and conflict resolution. For instance, when asked on the questionnaire “What are Some Challenges you face regarding conflict and/or conflict resolution plan in your school?” one of the Stream Crest teachers responded on the questionnaire that “the staff adheres to a similar philosophy
of resolving conflicts with children”. In contrast, on the same questions Armus respondents mentioned “apathy on the part of some teachers” and “few [teachers] are really ‘in to it’ [referencing conflict resolution] some are sort of trying and then others don’t really know what or how to get started”.

Another major difference when examining conflict resolution in the respective schools are the actual dynamics of the school in relation to size of teachers and student body. For instance, Armus Elementary has 30 full-time faculty members and 350 students whereas Stream Crest has six faculty members (four full-time, two part-time) and about fifty students. Stream Crest’s smaller size results in more of a community feel. This was evident by the time I spent observing in the school.

For example, since classes are smaller all the fifteen students were able to hang “I am Me” poems on the bulletin board across from the main entrance. Although this may seem like an insignificant example, larger classes would only have room to hang 15 of their 26 students’ work, creating a less inclusive environment. Another component that creates community is the physical space in Stream Crest. The physical classrooms are larger than Armus and the students are able to work in non-traditional spaces such as couches and chairs, not being constantly separated by desks, rows etc. The last observation about creating community is the element of communal property. Stream Crest has most of their supplies (calculators, pens, and markers) in the middle of the classroom for all students to share. Whereas
Armus Elementary has individual’s supplies kept in the student’s desk which was the center of the student’s work area.

In addition to this physical space, Stream Crest also has different dynamics in relation to teacher/teacher relations. Stream Crest, due to its smaller size, only has four classrooms – Kindergarten, 1-2 combined, 3-4 combined, 5-6 combined which lessens direct competition between teachers of the same grade. When asked “What are some challenges you face regarding conflict and/or conflict resolution plan in your school currently?” many Armus teachers spoke specifically about conflict among teachers.

- “Back stabbing among staff, competition between elementary grade level teachers that have difficulty working together”.
- “Conflicts among staff – lack of communication, only some folks know information”.
- “Staff conflicts are dealt with ineffectively”.
- “…Should begin addressing bullying and teacher-teacher conflicts. The latter is the hardest to accomplish in my opinion”.

In fact, of those teachers surveyed at Armus, 63% of the respondents discussed other teachers as part of the challenges regarding conflict and/or conflict resolution programs. In comparison, at Stream Crest one teacher, or 16% of the respondents, wrote about other teachers when asked the same question:

- “It is hard for teachers to use it amongst themselves”.
As far as the observational component is concerned, I attended staff meetings at both schools. Camaraderie at the staff meetings differ. At Stream Crest, teachers were sitting on couches in a teacher’s classroom, eating snacks, and recapping antidotal episodes from that day of teaching. In contrast, Armus Elementary had their staff meeting before school also in a teacher’s classroom. This atmosphere was friendly and welcoming but ran much more like a meeting with the principal leading and discussion welcomed from the teachers. Although Stream Crest and Armus Elementary have their share of differences: teachers’ perceptions of the conflict resolution programs, degrees of parental involvement and size there were also some notable similarities.

Examination of Similarities

First, teachers at both schools noted on their questionnaires the need for other conflict resolution besides teacher-student and student-student. At Armus teachers wrote:

- “address teacher/teacher concern”
- “Very angry, aggressive students are ‘never wrong’ or ‘didn’t do it’ with parents that call in and scream because we’re picking on their child”.
- “I also feel we should talk more about teacher-parent and teacher-teacher conflict”.

At Stream Crest teachers wrote:

- “It is hard for teachers to use it amongst themselves”.


- “The biggest challenge is guiding children through resolving conflicts for me is when parents fail to support and/or understand the process”.

(teacher/parent)

As Bodine and Crawford note, explained in chapter two, the most successful conflict resolution program integrates all stakeholders of the school.

Another similarity evident by the questionnaires and the Mayer interview was that most educators at both schools believe students should solve their own conflicts. When asked “As an educator do you feel it better to have students solve their own conflicts (minimal disagreements/no bodily harm or violence likely to occur) rather than have adults come to the assistance of children?” Armus respondents answered:

- “Students need to learn how to deal with problems so they can become adults with effective strategies”.

- “I think that an adult could be present but only as a third party to stop conflicts from escalating too far, but kids need to be given the chance to fix the problems themselves and learn early”.

- “Personally, I would like to be involved as a third party to watch the conflicts get resolved. It is my hope that students will eventually be able to resolve issues without help”.

Stream Crest respondents answered:

- “They can refine their skills”.

- “Absolutely – the goal of everything I teach is to encourage children to take responsibility for themselves and their actions”.

In revisiting some of the literature discussed in chapter two, many authors promote children working out their own solutions. For instance, Sweeney and Carruthers note the first principle of conflict is that conflict is an evolving experience, parties in conflict are cocreators of the conflict and each has some responsibility in its solution. Bodine and Crawford reiterate the pedagogy of conflict resolution is based on building a foundation of problem solving. Students are especially successful when they can discuss win-win strategies among themselves. They write that conflict resolution is a collaborative process in which those with ownership of the problem participate directly in crafting a solution to the problem. The Ohio Department of Education also states that students are responsible and can solve their own problems while examining the most peaceful solutions to the problems ("Ohio" 8).
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Despite those many additional obstacles that Armus deals with, their conflict resolution program has made very large strides in the school. Many teachers felt that their peer mediation program and the dedicated faculty that work to further develop their conflict resolution programs have impacted students positively. A commendable effort created by some of these dedicated teachers include Armus’ website entitled “Armus Elementary Conflict Resolution Group” which is divided in three main components: student information, teacher information, and conflict resolution resources. The student information category gives information about the peer mediators and “ideas about how to solve problems and deal with feelings”. The teacher information allows teachers to locate information for lesson plans and classroom resources and finally the conflict resolution resources gives an extensive list of web resources appropriate for students and teachers.

Both faculty at Stream Crest and Armus have written in great lengths about the gain their students have made. From responses such as “it is effective in creating a harmonious society” (Armus) to “Even those who come from other schools and have little skills in resolving conflict over time, make significant progress in becoming part of the solution to any conflict.”

In conclusion, both student bodies gain substantially from having conflict resolution programs. Although the schools have their own unique approaches, both schools are dedicated.
Recommendation for Practice

After researching and writing this thesis the primary recommendation I have for both schools to broaden their conflict resolution programs. As evidenced by the questionnaires, there is a real need for teacher/teacher and teacher/parent conflict resolution. It is a start to have student/student and student/teacher conflict resolution programs but there are many other stakeholders in the schools. The scope could even be broadened to include school/community and teacher/administration (including school boards etc) resolution programs. To have only two discrete resolution plans creates a disservice to the schools meeting their full potential.

As far as suggestions for Stream Crest, I would recommend Stream Crest put their conflict resolution plan in writing. Stream Crest has a very general mention of the conflict resolution in their handbook but there was slight confusion among teachers what their conflict resolution plan specifically dealt with. When schools, such as Stream Crest, have an integrated approach to conflict resolution, meaning it is present throughout their curriculum, philosophy, and overall atmosphere of the school, it can be challenging to have an actual tangible conflict resolution plan in writing. The lack of this plan in writing can create problems regarding the proper protocol and procedures to follow when conflict arises.

Another specific recommendation that was very evident in my research can be the lack of understanding of Stream Crest’s motto of “using your words”. Although this is a positive approach to conflict resolution there are
many implications of just using your words. For instance, reiterating the mantra “using words” may unwittingly lessen the focus on listening skills, learned cooperation, and critical thinking. For a student to be able to articulate what the conflict is about is a positive skill, however the student also needs to be able to listen attentively to the other side and critically brainstorm win-win situations for all parties involved.

As for specific recommendations for Armus, I recommend increasing efforts for parental involvement, possibly even making it mandatory. As discussed with great detail in chapter four, parental involvement has been an issue at Armus. Unfortunately, with parental involvement lacking it proves more challenging for the children to utilize the conflict resolution skills they learned in the classroom at home.

Finally, I recommend Armus specifically focus on establishing the importance of a conflict resolution plan among all the faculty of the school. As discussed in chapter four, many of the teachers were somewhat divided on the proved effectiveness of using a conflict resolution program. I believe students will not benefit when some teachers are negligent when it comes to adhering to a school conflict resolution plan.

**Recommendation for Future Research**

There are many recommendations for future research, ranging from minor to major suggestions. A minor recommendation includes spending more observation time in each school. During the data collection period of this thesis, most of the observation centered around the classroom. However, it
would have proven beneficial to have more exposure to the students while there was less teacher supervision present. The most obvious places with less teacher supervision include the lunchroom and playground. Through observation in these environments it is likely a researcher see conflict arising and students dealing with these conflicts autonomously or with the guidance of peer mediation. When students deal with the conflict autonomously it is more obvious for the researcher to determine if the student has internalized much of their conflict resolution lessons.

A major recommendation for future research is understanding the long-term gains of conflict resolution programs, particularly related to student development. To gain substantial understanding of this development, it would be crucial to observe the same students for at least a full academic year, ideally two years. This would allow a researcher to see if a student could become unconsciously skilled as Bodine and Crawford introduced in the circle of learning (reference chapter 2, page 32). A student achieves the unconsciously skilled level after passing through the previous three stages: unconsciously unskilled, consciously unskilled and consciously skilled. Once the student is unconsciously skilled the student would be able to perform conflict resolution competently and automatically. However, in this comparative study it was difficult to see how much the students internalized their conflict resolution skills. Further studies that could measure this internalization would help the conflict resolution field greatly.
Finally, a major area that deserves much more research is the comparison of conflict resolution programs at public elementary schools and independent, democratic-based schools. Surprisingly, there is very little published research regarding these two styles of education and their respective conflict resolution programs. It would be very beneficial to read about comparative studies regarding both approaches to education.
APPENDIX A

An Inquiry About Conflict in Your School

Participant # ______

School:

Reflecting on the Conflict Resolution Plan in your school, please rate the following six questions from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5)

1) We have an effective Conflict Resolution Program in our school.

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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Agree</td>
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2) Conflict resolution is integrated into different parts of the curriculum

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3) Conflict resolution is an important part of my job responsibilities.

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4) Teacher/faculty members are given adequate preparation to carry out conflict resolution.

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5) Conflict resolution has been effective in handling most conflict that arises in my classroom.

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6) In child/child conflict children are more likely to solve the problem amongst themselves rather than getting a teacher to help in the problem solving

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For the following two questions please check all that apply:

7.) What forms of conflict concern occur most in your school?
   - _____ Cliques
   - _____ Name Calling
   - _____ Taunting
   - _____ Bullying
   - _____ Physical Violence (no weapon involved)
   - _____ Physical Violence (weapon involved)

8.) Where does most of the conflict occur at your school?
   - _____ Classroom
   - _____ Lunch period
   - _____ Recess
   - _____ After School
   - _____ Restrooms

Please answer yes or no to the following seven questions

Does your school Conflict Resolution plan address:

9.) Teacher/Student conflict   _____ Y  _____ N
10.) Teacher/Teacher    _____ Y  _____ N
11.) Teacher/Parent               _____ Y  _____ N
12.) Student/Student    _____ Y  _____ N

Does your school have a:

13.) Peer-mediation program   _____ Y  _____ N
14.) Bullying prevention program   _____ Y  _____ N
15.) Positive Discipline classroom meetings  _____ Y  _____ N

Please provide a short response to the following questions. If more room is needed continue on the back page.

16.) What are some challenges you face regarding conflict and/or the conflict resolution plan in your school currently?

17.) Describe the effectiveness of your Conflict Resolution Program? How could it be improved?

18.) As an educator do you feel it better to have students solve their own conflicts (minimal disagreements/no bodily harm or violence likely to occur) rather than have adults come to the assistance of the children? Why or why not?

19.) Describe any changes in your conflict resolution plan and the consequences?

Any other feedback or additional information you would like to share?
APPENDIX B

Ohio University Consent Form

**Title of Research:** The similarities and differences regarding conflict resolution in two elementary schools.

**Principal Investigator:** Joanna E. Binsfeld (Graduate Student – Ohio University

**Department:** International Studies – International Development (Education)

Federal and University regulations require signed consent for participation in research involving human subjects. After reading the statements below, please indicate your consent by signing this form.

**Explanation of Study**
The intent of my thesis is to examine conflict resolution in elementary schools. I seek to employ qualitative analysis in order to gain a richer understanding about the similarities and differences regarding conflict resolution programs in different elementary schools. I am asking you fill out a questionnaire I composed of 19 questions that should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

**Risks and Discomforts:**
There are no known or anticipated risks associated with the questions or completing the questionnaire.

**Benefits:**
There are numerous benefits to this study. One of the most compelling is that conflict resolution is of growing interest and the more we understand about conflict resolution the more apt we are to incorporate it into the schools, creating a more welcoming environment for all those participants.

**Confidentiality:**
All questionnaires will be completely confidential with the Researcher (Joanna Binsfeld) and Research Adviser (Dr. Jaylynne Hutchinson) solely looking at the raw material. All participants will be given a number as an identifying feature. **Names of schools/ questionnaire respondents and likeness will not appear in the thesis; protection of all participants is of utmost importance to the Researcher and the entire Ohio University community.** All documents will be destroyed after the thesis defense (approximately May 2004).

**Compensation:**
There is no compensation for participation in the thesis expect genuine gratitude from the Researcher and entire Ohio University community.
Contact Person:
If you have any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me at 740-707-1807 or via e-mail at joannabinsfeld@hotmail.com. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding the questionnaire or entire study.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664

I certify that I have read and understand this consent form and agree to participate as a subject in the research described. I agree that known risks to me have been explained to my satisfaction and I understand that no compensation is available from Ohio University and its employees for any injury resulting from my participation in this research. I certify that I am 18 years of age or older. My participation in this research is given voluntarily. I understand that I may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of any benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. I certify that I have been given a copy of this consent form to take with me.

Signature: ________________________________
Printed Name: ________________________________
Date: ________________________________

I give permission for the Researcher (Joanna Binsfeld) to contact me in the future for further questions regarding this study? Yes  No
Works Cited


Lane-Garon, P. and T. Richardson. “Mediator Mentors: Improving School Climate, Nurturing Student Disposition.” *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 21 (Fall 2003): 46-47.


