

Actively Engaging Students and Staff to Reformulate a Peer Mediation Program

at an Urban Chartered School: A Test of Action Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

An Action Evaluation was conducted on a peer mediation program in an urban-chartered high school. Action Evaluation is a new methodology that engages program participants in a participatory and reflective process that clarifies program goals, motivations, and processes. The Action Evaluation described here utilized paper and pencil surveys followed by small group discussions of goal statements. Input from students and teachers were actively incorporated into the program design. As a result, the mediation program was transformed from a program narrowly focused on student conflicts to broader goals involving the personal self-development of the mediators.

BACKGROUND

This paper describes an Action Evaluation (Rothman, 1997a) of a peer mediation program in an urban-chartered high school. This evaluation illustrates the positive impact of small group dialog on formative program design, and the empowering effect of interactive reflection.

The Charter School

The client organization for this evaluation is a county-chartered high school specializing in the recruitment of at-risk students from other schools. The school is located in a small urban area near Detroit, Michigan. This school provides its students with a complete education, but it specializes in vocational training in the building and automotive trades. It is located in a modestly sized urban area characterized by a depressed industrial economy, and high rates of social problems such as crime and drug abuse. In the fall of 1997 the school hired an outside consultant to implement a peer-mediation training program. Out of a total enrollment of 90, six students were trained in these techniques. The students are of mixed ethnic background, mostly African-American, Caucasian and Hispanic, and primarily of lower socio-economic status.

The Peer Mediation Training Project

The program that was evaluated is a peer-mediation training program. This utilizes a curriculum and a set of process steps that have been developed by the local county educational support agency. It involves a seven-step approach to mediating conflicts, printed materials and role-playing exercises. The program has also been extensively tested in other, nearby schools (see below). Thus, this program was already designed and in implementation when this author was brought on board to evaluate it. The formative evaluation activities described here therefore consist of adapting the program to fit the needs of a specific school. While this placed a limit on the extent and nature of the impact the evaluation could have, it is nevertheless an important and valuable experience for program staff to become informed about the perceptions and expectations of various constituencies even after

implementation begins. The program described here is part of a larger multi-county effort by the educational support agency to reduce violence and conflict in schools, project SAVE (Students Against Violence through Education). The effectiveness of SAVE has been examined at the intermediate district level by comparing disciplinary incident rates for participating schools before and after implementation. Evidence for the effectiveness of the program was found. In addition, certain implementation achievements were documented, including the numbers of students and school staff receiving training. Although information such as this is useful, it consists entirely of "summative" data: outcome measures and objectives achieved. Action Evaluation (see below) provides additional types of data. It assists in the formulation of goals by the program participants themselves, it allows the participants to begin to specify how they envision achieving their goals, and provides some information concerning the effectiveness of students and staff acting together as a group. Thus, Action Evaluation supplements traditional evaluation activities.

The Needs of At-Risk Students

This school was chartered for the purpose of attracting low-income drop out students from the public school system and training them in the automotive repair and building construction trades. Thus this student population is an especially needy one, in terms of a lack of skills, dysfunctional backgrounds and a strong need for emotional support. These particular students, after all, were not able to cope with the demands made on them at some other school. Yet the underlying assumption made at this charter school is that these students are not lacking in intellectual ability, merely the necessary motivation to apply themselves. Thus the school staff is keenly aware of the importance of finding innovative ways to raise and maintain student motivation. According to the steering committee in charge of program implementation, peer mediation was seen as just such an innovative method of actively engaging the students and raising their interest in self-development.

Active Engagement, Peer Mediation, and Action Evaluation

As will be seen, the program staff at the charter school had a number of unarticulated goals for peer mediation that went beyond merely resolving conflicts. In fact, as will also be seen, violent confrontation is not really a problem at this school. According to surveys they filled out and discussion which occurred as they met in groups (see below) staff at the school saw mediation training as a vehicle for promoting among the students a sense of initiative and self-worth, which would in turn have positive effects on the school environment as a whole. Peer mediation is seen as having this potential because it teaches a form of collaborative decision-making--students are instructed to assert themselves before their peers and guide them in constructive problem solving. Peer mediation is well known for its content (the "six steps" to resolving a conflict) but in some ways it is the pedagogy or style of instruction that is more important. By learning to mediate conflicts, the students also learn an effective form of public self-expression. Action Evaluation (AE) has complementary goals. Action Evaluation has its roots in the Action Research perspective of the students and intellectual descendants of Kurt Lewin, including Argyris (Argyris & Schon, 1978, 1991), Schon (1983), and Whyte (1990). Action Evaluation emphasizes, among other things, an emphasis placed upon including the participants as colleagues in the evaluation process. This is done in order to maximize the direct benefits of the evaluation to the participants themselves. In some ways, action evaluation can be seen as a type of intervention itself, one that targets another intervention, and assists that other intervention in clarifying goals and becoming more participatory. It helps, of course, if the target intervention (the "program", in this case peer mediation) has client participation as one of its own goals. Peer mediation targets student decision making, but explicitly only in the context of a student conflict, not as part of designing the program itself. Making program design something that the students can contribute too is a natural next step, and this action evaluation was intended to facilitate just that. Another complementary goal of Action Evaluation is to support and encourage "reflection in action" on the part of the participants (Schon, 1983). This means helping the participants describe the tacit knowledge in their heads through a process of observation and reflection (see Fetterman, this conference). Argyris and Schon (1978) call this process "double-loop learning", or examining the frame. Thus, when people are

asked to describe their thinking to someone else, they are forced to reflect upon themselves and their perspective. This can be compared to what Ury (1991) described as "going up on the balcony" and looking down on us. Action Evaluation is designed to accomplish this-Rothman (1997b) calls it "Interactive Introspection", reflecting on oneself, one's situation, and sharing one's insights with others. If the author could suggest a cardinal rule for action evaluators to follow, it would say something like "In order to help the organization actively engage their clients, it is essential for the evaluator first to actively engage the staff." Engaging all stakeholders is an important priority for Action Evaluation. The more stakeholders can be explicit in defining their goals to each other, the more effectively they can define success in an interactive and dynamic way (Rothman, 1997c). Thus, if the program personnel seem genuinely interested in assisting their clients to actually participate in decision-making, then the action evaluation itself should unfold in a fairly straightforward process. That was indeed the case in the present example. As will be shown, the staff was very accepting of the AE process and cooperated actively. The rest of this paper will describe the process by which the staff and students at this school were engaged in the process of redesigning their peer mediation program.

THE EVALUATION PLAN

The Peer Mediation Steering Committee: Aversion to Controversy

The school had assigned a steering committee for the purpose of providing oversight for the program, and it was this steering committee through which the evaluation was initially introduced to the school. This author met twice with the Peer Mediation Steering Committee during the baseline stage of the evaluation. The first meeting was brief and informal. The group consisted of five individuals: the author's Primary Contact (a consultant), two county employees, the Principle, and the Program Director (a teacher). The group was relaxed and very friendly, both with me and with each other. I explained the concept of Action Evaluation, and they seemed enthusiastic. Eager to learn more about student and teacher perceptions, they verbally agreed with me to use that information in refining their program. I presented AE as a logical extension of a peer mediation program that would further engage the students and involve them in program activities. During this first meeting, I learned both what these individuals wanted and did not want from an evaluation. Some of the committee members expressed a rejection of traditional "outcome" oriented traditional evaluation methods. Such methods were perceived as external and detached from the needs of the school. At the same time, they wanted a process that would strengthen the program and allow them to use it to showcase their school. They did not want a researcher to come in, gather data on their students, and then leave without returning some value to the students and the staff. Action Evaluation seemed to fit their needs particularly well. It also became clear that there was some reluctance to allow either the evaluation or the mediation program to address potentially controversial issues. This reluctance particularly affected the design of the questionnaire. Specifically, the "What" item was worded to focus on the types of conflicts respondents could identify in their school (see appendix). This is a somewhat different approach to that usually used in an Action Evaluation, which would normally ask respondents to list any type of goal or objective that they felt the program could address. Some members of the steering committee were afraid that the evaluation, and the project itself, could be put into jeopardy if the question were allowed to be broader. The fear was that certain politically controversial issues between the staff and the administration might get aired which could not easily be handled within the context of the student mediation program. The "Why" and the "How" items were standard for Action Evaluation. As will be seen, the reluctance of the steering committee to confront controversial topics was overcome as a result of group discussion.

Designing the Plan

Together the steering committee and I designed an evaluation plan. The final evaluation plan is summarized in Figure 1. During the Data Collection and Analysis stage, the intent was to use an open-ended survey instrument to elicit program goals, justifications for the goals, and processes that are expected to lead to the goals. Structured

group meetings were to be used to explore the survey responses, allow all participants an opportunity to provide input, and arrive at a school-wide consensus.

FIGURE 1: THE EVALUATION PLAN

I. Data Collection and Analysis Stage

- 1 ● Baseline Survey of all Students, Teachers and the Steering Committee.
- 2 ● Separate Group Meetings with Student Mediators, Teachers, and Steering Committee to discuss their survey results and arrive at consensus concerning goals, reasons, and processes.
- 3 ● All three groups meet together to discuss each other's ideas and arrive at a general consensus.

II. Formative Evaluation Stage

The Steering Committee designs the following:

- 1 ● Formative Flowchart and Action Plan
- 2 ● Summative Flowchart and Tracking Plan

III. Summative Stage

- 1. Implement Action and Tracking Plans
- 2. Update Goals with new mediators

THE SURVEY AND THE GROUP DIALOGS

The Baseline Data Collection Stage The survey form was extremely brief, and simply consisted of three open-ended questions, each intended to address one of the three aspects of Action Evaluation: What, Why and How. There was a different version for the students and teachers than for the Steering Committee (see Appendix A). Answers to each of these questions were then compared to by the evaluator to determine which were Shared within each constituency group, which were Unique to a given individual, and which were Contrasting, or opposed to each other. The overall survey responses appear in Appendix B. These results were tabulated by group, and each of the groups then met separately to discuss the results and arrive at a group consensus. The process used to structure each group discussion was as follows: first the action evaluator presented a summary of the results of the survey on a flip chart. It was explained to the group that the purpose of the discussion was to arrive at a consensus regarding what type of conflicts the mediation program should address, why it should address them, and how. The resulting consensus would be presented to the other two groups at a later meeting. As each point was explained each member was given an opportunity to make comments and express support or disagreement. Open dialog was encouraged. Each survey result was voted on, using a majority rule to include each statement in the groups' official consensus. Such a highly structured process was necessitated by constraints on time and opportunity to conduct group discussions. Yet it also proved to be a productive forum to elicit information and ideas from the students and staff regarding the program. This same basic process was used with all three groups.

The Student Mediators

These students were all intelligent and cooperative, although somewhat bored with the process and distracted by academic testing going on elsewhere in the school that day. They appeared interested yet tired, yet they cooperated well in the group discussion process. The Mediator Consensus is also displayed in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2A: MEDIATORS' SURVEY RESULTS

Most Common Conflicts	Why Important?	How Resolve?
No Conflicts (11)	Not Important (9)	Cant Resolve (7)
Student/Teacher (16)	Prevent Escalation (7)	Get People to talk (13)
Student/Student (8)	Improve Environment (6)	Get people in groups (5)
Stealing/Property (7)	Prevent Harm/Death (5)	Seperate/Stand between (4)
Gangs/Turf (6)	Prevent Spread Cmnty (4)	Listen (4)
Dating/Jealousy (4)	Stop Fighting (3)	Help to find solution (1)
Threats (4)	Help Improve Skills (2)	Be neutral (1)
Teasing (4)	Offer Support/Friendship (2)	
Students/"Outsiders" (2)	Resolve Long-term (2)	
Racial (1)	Student-Teacher Relations (1)	
	Prevent Bullying (1)	

FIGURE 2B: MEDIATORS' FINAL CONSENSUS

Student/Staff (5)	Offer Support (3)	Help find solution
Threats (4)		Be Neutral
Teasing (3)		

Most Common Conflicts	Why Important?	How Resolve?
Student/Student (6)	Prevent Escalation (6)	Get People to talk
Stealing/Property (6)	Student-Teacher Relations (5)	Get people in groups
Turf/Gangs (6)	Improve Skills (4)	Seperate/Stand between
Dating/Jealousy (6)	Prevent Harm (3)	Listen
Student/Staff (5)	Offer Support (3)	Help find solution
Threats (4)		Be Neutral
Teasing (3)		

Evidence that this process actively engaged the students is easy to find in the table above. The survey results and the results of the group dialog hardly resemble one another. Although the survey was useful for the purpose of getting individuals thinking in terms of goals, motivations and processes, and was helpful in supporting group discussion, the fact that the final consensus of the group was very different from the opinions expressed on the surveys is evidence that the discussion engaged the students in a creative manner. The most common types of conflict mentioned by the students in the survey were student-teacher conflicts, as well as the idea that there were no important conflicts in this school and consequently, that conflicts either couldn't or didn't need to be resolved. Although the mediators' survey results did not differ strongly from the larger student body, discussing their results

as a group had the effect of reaffirming the importance of the program they were involved in and clarified their goals for it. Basically, the results of the dialog seem to indicate that the mediators were primarily concerned with different types of conflict that they were familiar with from their experiences in school. The action evaluation therefore appears to have helped uncover conflicts and issues that perhaps some students had initially been reluctant to acknowledge. Hopefully, this will provide the program with a degree of personal relevance to the students it might not otherwise possess.

The Teachers and Adult Staff The teachers and some of the school's non-teacher staff met as a group the same day as the mediators. There were nine individuals present at this meeting, six teachers and three cafeteria staff. The same discussion procedure was used as for the mediators. The summary of the teachers survey results that was used to structure discussion appears below (Figure 3). Open discussion was slower to get started, as the adults seemed a little more reticent to express themselves than the mediators had been. Yet gradually, as more and more individuals joined in the conversation, the meeting became more animated. The liveliest discussion revolved around the issue of students mediating between students and adult staff. This idea had been generated by one teacher's survey form, and it was also one of the goals that the student mediators had achieved consensus on. Some of the adult staff were moderately supportive, but at least two teachers were very much against it, seeing this as an opportunity for the students to undermine adult authority. In fact, it began to appear that for at least some of the adult staff, trust in the students was not very high. One statement made was that the "type" of student they had there always tries to abuse or exploit the system. There was one anecdote concerning a student who had faked suicidal feelings just to play around with a naive social worker. Eventually the group agreed to put the issue aside and perhaps deal with it at some later date. The evaluator agreed, knowing that it would come up again at the final consensus meeting. Otherwise, consensus on program goals, reasons, and processes was not hard to achieve. The results for the teachers are presented in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3A: TEACHERS' SURVEY RESULTS

Most Common Conflicts	Why Important?	How Resolve?
Student/Staff (3)	Positive Environment (4)	Put Parties Into Groups (4)
Disrespect (3)	Prevent Escalation (3)	Talk Over Problem (3)
Rumors (3)	Improve Skills (1)	Squash Rumors (1)
Turf/Gangs (2)	Stop Fights (1)	Implement Plan (1)
Verbal (2)	Provide Support (1)	
Teasing (1)	Prevent Spillover (1)	
	Be Student Role Models (1)	
	Promote City Identity (1)	
	Resolve Long-term (2)	

FIGURE 3B: TEACHERS' FINAL CONSENSUS

Most Common Conflicts	Why Important?	How Resolve?
Student/Student (9)	Prevent Escalation (9)	N/A
Disrespect (9)	Improve Skills (9)	
Rumors (9)	Prevent Fights (9)	
Turf/Gangs (9)	Be Student Role Models (9)	
Drugs/Marijuana (7)	Positive Peer Pressure (9)	

Again, the evidence suggests that the teachers, although perhaps not as engaged as the mediators by the process, are taking the discussion seriously and using it as an opportunity to express themselves. The group consensus did not differ as much from the survey results as the mediators had, more taking the form of a refinement and a focusing on what was truly important. It is clear from the Why statements that the mediation program is seen as more than just a method of resolving conflicts, but that the mediators are expected to act as role models for the

students and have a positive impact upon the rest of the school. This issue would reappear later when all three groups came together for a final meeting.

The Steering Committee The third meeting with the steering committee was upbeat and productive. This meeting was conducted just after a public rally had been held in support of the mediation program, and everyone was flush with excitement over the success of the event. This group went over their survey results in somewhat greater detail than the other two groups, for two reasons: the relatively high professional sophistication with regards to research, and the organizational power this group had over the future of the program. Thus, the consensus they eventually reached was broader and more conceptual than the other two groups, but otherwise compatible. These results are presented in Figure 4.

FIGURE 4A: STEERING COMMITTEE SURVEY RESULTS

Most Common Conflicts	Why Important?	How Resolve?
Dating/Jealousy (4)	Positive Environment (3)	Educate Others (1)
Disrespect/Mugging (2)	Improve Skills (2)	Demonstrate Skills (1)
Rumors (2)	Provide Support (1)	Domino Effect (1)
Verbal Abuse (2)	Prevent Escalation (2)	Use Mediators' Student Insight (1)
Parental Issues (1)	Prevent Spillover (1)	Student Respect (1)
	Overcome Negative Values (1)	Use as Role Models (1)
		Emphasize Positive (1)
		Problem-Solving (1)
		Students as part of solution

FIGURE 4B: STEERING COMMITTEE FINAL CONSENSUS

Most Common Conflicts	Why Important?	How Resolve?
Use Students to Mediate Conflicts (6)	Students Are Respected (6)	Use Standard Curriculum
Build Skill Repertoire (6)	Skills Will Last With Them (6)	Continual Reinforcement from Different Sources (6)
Mediators to be Student Role Models (6)	Build Adult Trust in Mediators' Decisions (6)	Mediator-Designed Behavior Contract and Self-Assessments (6)

The steering committee, of course, could be expected to be engaged by this process since it due to their sponsorship that it occurred at all. Nevertheless, the data in figure 4 is evidence that they made very profitable use of the opportunity to engage in group dialog. A huge change occurred as a result of the group discussion concerning their survey responses. It was as if the members of the steering committee saw precisely where they stood, as a group, for the first time. Partially this may have been due to the increasing familiarity and experience of the evaluator, but all the ideas that resulted came from members of the committee itself. "Types of Conflict" is no longer focused exclusively on types of conflicts, but has broadened to include other types of goals for the program as well. In spite of the narrow problem-focus initially imposed upon the survey, the group dialogs were able to reveal the expanded goals the participants wished for the program. Note that two of the three goals now focus on the impact the program is expected to have upon the mediators themselves, rather than the impact the mediators should have on student conflict. Also notice that the degree of consensus has increased dramatically.

Group Dialog with All Participants

Looking over the consensus results of all three groups, some interesting patterns emerge. The differences stand out, especially those between the students and the other two groups. Yet it is also true that there was much in common between the three groups of participants, who discussed their ideas completely independently of each other. These comparisons are presented in Figure 5. As can be seen, there were a large number of unique goals, reasons, and processes, with a smaller number of shared, and only one significant contrast (student-teacher mediations). These results were presented at the final group meeting and used as the basis of discussion. The final group discussion itself resolved all contrasting and unique statements. The end result of these group discussions became the "final baseline data", which is also presented in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5A: Individual Group Consensus' Compared

Goals (What)	Reasons (Why)	Processes (How)
Shared Goal: Mediators Mediate Student Conflicts (MTC)	Prevent Escalation (MTC)	Use The Six Steps (MTC)
	Improve Student Skills (TC)	Assign a Mediation Room (TC)
	Improve Student Esteem (TC)	Provide Sign-up Sheet (M)
	Mediators to be Role Models (TC)	Intervene Early (T)
	Offer Emotional Support (M)	Non-Aggressive Approach (T)
	Support Rules/ Authority (T)	Inform Adult (T)
	Positive Learning Environment (C)	Dont Question Rules (T)
		Teachers Can Call Mediators (T)
		Written Behavior Contract (C)
		Continuous Reinforcement (C)
Contrasting Goal: Mediate Student- Teacher Conflicts (M vs T)	Contrasting Reasons: None	Contrasting Processes: None

FIGURE 5B: PROJECT FINAL CONSENSUS

Goals (What)	Reasons (Why)	Processes (How)
Mediate Verbal Conflicts	Prevent Escalation	Use The Six Steps
	Improve Student Skills	Request Box and Forms
	Improve Student Esteem	Use a Mediation Room
	Mediators Become Role Models	Teachers To Call On Mediators
	Promote Positive Learning Environment	Mediators to Approach Teachers
		Mediators to Intervene Early
		Mediators to Provide Support to Others
		Mediators Design Behavior Contract

USE OF THE BASELINE DATA

Formulating an Action Plan

Once a final consensus had been achieved, the action-evaluator and the steering committee took the statements concerning how the program was to achieve it's goals, and developed an action plan based on them (Figure 6). As can be seen, new features of the program have emerged, features that reflect the concerns of both the students and the teachers. In particular, the role of the mediators has been expanded, from responding only to student-initiated conflicts to becoming resources for the teachers to rely on. In addition, their role as student leaders has been clarified. By allowing the mediators to design a behavior contract, it is hoped by the steering committee that the program will have an increased and more meaningful impact on the students' lives, while at the same time giving them both more voice and more responsibility. FIGURE 6 (See enclosed appendix)

Formulating a Tracking Plan

In addition to an Action Plan, it was felt necessary to formally set out how the steering committee intended to collect data on each of the How statements during future semesters (Figure 7). This plan will be implemented

during the fall, 1998 semester. FIGURE 7 (see enclosed appendix)

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the evaluation, the project was transformed from a top-down approach narrow focus on student mediations to a broader consensus regarding expanded project goals. These expanded goals included using the mediators as student role models, and using mediation training to support the intellectual and emotional development of the student mediators. Thus, the underlying purpose of the mediation training program has evolved to more fully enrich and support the educational environment. This process of broadening and clarifying the goals of the program in response to input from each constituency is illustrated by the resolution of the issue of student-teacher mediations, which helped to resolve some of the lack of trust between adults and students (see above). The student mediators now have a mechanism by which they can articulate their concerns to the teachers in a dignified and effective fashion. In addition, the teachers now have a mechanism by which they can use the mediators as allies in protecting the order and structure they see as essential to a positive learning environment. Finally, the steering committee was able not only to overcome their reluctance to deal with potentially controversial aspects of the program, but found a way to articulate their desire to promote positive student development to the other groups. The action evaluation methodology supported these outcomes by engaging all three constituencies and helping them articulate their concerns to the others. Because Action Evaluation is a relatively new technique, and therefore methods of implementation are still undergoing a certain amount of development, specific methodological issues should receive some attention.

Methodological Conclusions

Action Evaluation has a standard process which includes asking the "what", "why", and "how" questions as well as using "shared", "unique", and "contrasting" categories to compare responses in the context of group discussion. The "Simple Model" of an Action Evaluation would involve gathering a stakeholder group together for a meeting, and within that one meeting, gathering information on individuals' goals, etc., having the group break their responses down into shared and other categories, discussing the results, and concluding with fairly detailed "how" statements to present to the other constituencies. The Simple Model is generally not followed however, since within these parameters a particular Action Evaluation may make use of a wide range of variations. Several such variations manifested themselves in the context of this evaluation. These included the use of a paper and pencil survey, making the collection of information from individuals separate from the group discussion context, the "problem" focus of the questionnaire as opposed to a "goal" focus, and separating the group discussions from the formative stage. In addition, the action and tracking plans were innovations of the author.

Baseline Data Collection: Paper/Pencil Survey vs. Group Discussion

The use of a paper and pencil survey and the division of the data collection into individual-respondent and group-discussion stages are not separate issues but different aspects of the same one. In some Action Evaluations (Ghais) baseline data on goals, reasons, and processes are collected while the stakeholding group is gathered together in a meeting, and the results are discussed immediately. Sometimes this is done for reasons of time or other constraints. In the present case, the paper and pencil baseline survey was a useful tool, even though it could have been very misleading had the responses not been discussed by the constituent groups. This can be seen in the impact of group discussion on the goal statements endorsed by members of particular groups. Thus, there are several benefits to using a preliminary survey: it causes the respondents to begin thinking in terms of project goals, reasons, etc., it structures group discussion around member input, and it provides researchers with a measure of the impact and

effectiveness of the stakeholder group discussions. Yet it also created a problem discussed in the next section.

Questionnaire Design: Problem vs. Goal Focus

Traditionally, Action Research has been conceptualized as a design organizations use to respond to problems. Action Evaluation is an attempt to provide a more proactive method of organizational development. The problem often lies in convincing organizations to look beyond the problem "at hand" and be willing to reflect upon the larger context. In the present evaluation this occurred when members of the steering committee expressed some reluctance to look beyond student conflict. This impacted the questions that the baseline survey was allowed to address, and consequently on the information that was available for group discussion. In the present case, this situation was overcome because individuals within the organization brought up broader issues in their responses to the survey, thus allowing these topics to be discussed. Unfortunately, this might not always be the case. A more ideal process would be to include broader questions in the baseline survey at the beginning of the evaluation, yet how to reassure clients who are hesitant to adopt a broader approach is still a problematic issue. The issue of the problem focus of the questionnaire was imposed on the evaluation by the reluctance of the steering committee to allow the survey to collect information beyond that strictly dealing with student mediations of student conflicts. As has been seen, this reluctance was overcome in two ways, by the student and teacher groups bringing up the subject of other types of conflicts independently of the steering committee, and by the steering committee itself, which as a result of brainstorming over their questionnaire responses spontaneously articulated other types of goals for the program, goals which related to the personal development of the mediators and their role within the school. Yet the issue only occurred in the first place because the decision to use a survey caused members of the Steering Committee to take up the issue of item wording. There appears to be no clear and obvious resolution to this dilemma, and future Action Evaluators will have to carefully weigh the pros and cons of various approaches before proceeding with the baseline data gathering process.

Program Formative Planning: Who to Include?

This evaluation included only the Steering Committee during the formative phase. This was done primarily for pragmatic and administrative reasons, because the Steering Committee already existed for the purpose of providing direction to the program. Yet an argument could be made that the underlying principles of action research and evaluation are not served unless the recipients of the service being provided are involved in the decision making process to the maximum extent possible. This issue should probably be seen as a long-term development issue- as the school staff and especially the administrators become gradually more comfortable with the process of including student and teacher input into program development decisions, a more extensive role may perhaps be found for them. Action and Tracking Planning: The "Action" in Action Evaluation.

Final Conclusions

As a result of the Action Evaluation, this peer mediation program has been re-designed with an increased degree of goal clarity and participative consensus that can be expected to produce positive benefits. The students hopefully now have a degree of buy-in that they would not experience without the opportunity to contribute their input. In addition, the clear and concise planning undertaken during the formative stage should result in an improved sense of program accomplishment.

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