Difficulties Conflicting Students Face during Mediation from Peer Mediators’ Perspective

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this study was to analyze the difficulties conflicting students encountered during mediation process as identified by peer mediator students. The study utilized semi-structured interview technique. Interview forms were used as data collection instrument and 45 peer mediators (24 females and 21 males) were interviewed. Results of the study indicated that conflicting students had certain types of difficulty in various areas while completing the five steps of the mediation process. The most prevalent of them was the difficulty and inability of the disputants to express their needs-reasons and their emotions-reasons. Similarly, mediator students also observed a certain level of emotional resistance by the conflicting students at this step. Thus, conflicting students either failed or showed resistance when attempting to look at the issue from the other’s perspective or empathize with them. As a direct result of this, conflicting students also experienced some difficulty in presenting solution alternatives and either failed to arrive at a solution or came up with self-serving ones. Furthermore, particularly male peer mediator students expressly stated that conflicting students had some difficulty in the last step of reaching an agreement.

Key Words: Peer Mediation, Conflict Resolution, Negotiation

SUMMARY

Purpose and Significance: Adult initiated problem solving approaches as disciplinary methods in schools seem to be ineffective in helping students develop appropriate behavior and in reducing student conflicts. Therefore, conflict resolution and peer mediation programs are often implemented in schools to reduce violence and transform student conflicts. Positive effects of peer mediation approach on student conflicts have been indicated by many researchers. However, none of those studies seems to focus on the process itself. Hence, the current study aims to analyze the difficulties conflicting students encountered during the mediation process through peer mediator students’ perspective.

Methods: This study utilized semi-structured interview technique. In this study, the difficulties conflicting students faced while completing the standard five steps of the mediation process to resolve their conflicts were analyzed through peer mediators’ perspective. These steps were (1) disputants’ taking turns to explain the problem, their needs and their reasons; (2) disputants’ taking turns to express the emotions they experienced during the conflict and their reasons; (3) disputants’ taking turns to explain what they understood from each others’ needs, emotions and their reasons, i.e. empathizing; (4) offering mutually acceptable solutions to their problem; and (5) reaching a peaceful and integrative agreement. In order to analyze the difficulties conflicting students encountered in completing these five steps, 45 peer mediator students (24 females and 21 males) who mediated actual conflicts were interviewed. Interview forms were used to collect data. Interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed into text. Verbal data were analyzed through qualitative data analysis technique. Coder reliability was found to be 94.23%.

Results: Mediator students named similar difficulties for the first and second steps (“disputants’ taking turns to explain the problem, their needs and their reasons” and “disputants’ taking turns to express the emotions they experienced during the conflict and their reasons” respectively). The most prevalent of them in both these steps as identified by the mediators was the difficulty and inability of the disputants to express themselves effectively. Both male and female mediators emphasized this difficulty. Similar difficulties were also identified for the third step (disputants’ taking turns to explain what they understood from each others’ needs, emotions and their reasons, i.e. empathizing). Mediator