

PEER MEDIATION

A research project into
“Primary and Secondary School Implementation”

A snapshot of Victorian schools running a peer mediation program

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Note: Patricia has now finished her course. A wonderful, diligent person who set a new mark for university students completing assigned tasks. I couldn't thank her enough for her time and efforts on this project.

WARNING

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ABSTRACT

This research project examines how Peer Mediation Programs were implemented in both Secondary and Primary Schools in Victoria. Overall, the

findings of the study highlight that whilst peer mediation may be becoming established throughout Victoria, it is still primarily communicated through word of mouth, and is driven by the individual efforts of particular schools and teachers.

Once peer mediation training is conducted, the program is often incorporated into the school's welfare and discipline policy. As such, the findings of this study suggest that it is slowly becoming an important part the culture in many of the schools surveyed. Peer mediation appears to be used for what has been described as 'less serious issues'. However, these type of issues seem to account for a high number of on-going disputes within school communities.

Like many other programs brought into schools, peer mediation suffers from a lack of allocated time and money. Constraints include time in running and organising mediation, financial limitations upon bringing in outside trainers and/or teacher release time.

This lack of resources has resulted in a sense of disappointment in the number of issues referred to mediation. There is however, a strong commitment from students to participate, and they report believing that the peer mediation process is effective within schools. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students referred to peer mediation have a higher rate of satisfaction than having conflicts dealt with by teachers.

Schools report being unable to map peer mediation programs due to a lack of clear evaluation methods.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SCHOOLS

In the 1960's and 1970's, religious and peace activists began to understand the importance of teaching conflict resolution skills to young children. At about the same time, teachers began incorporating dispute resolution lessons into their curricula, but their efforts were unorganised and isolated. In 1981, Educators for Social Responsibility (USA) organised these independent activities into a national association. Their central question, "How can students learn alternative ways of dealing with conflict?," was precisely what peace educators had addressed for years.

In the summer of 1984, fifty United States educators and community mediators met for a four day school mediation institute to discuss starting conflict resolution programs in schools. In many countries today, students of all ages are being taught how to deal with anger constructively, how to communicate feelings and concerns without using violence and abusive language, how to think critically about alternative solutions, and how to agree to solutions in which all parties win.

Australia first looked at peer mediation more widely in the early '90's, though this tended to teach students basic conflict skills within a classroom environment rather than having students assist others within an overall school context. There is no formal recording of this history in Australia. Anecdotal evidence suggests some schools may have run programs as early as 1988. More formal training programs first started appearing in Australia between 1992-1994 and these are tracked through publications.

INTRODUCTION

This research project examines how Peer Mediation Programs were implemented in both Secondary and Primary Schools in Victoria. The study assesses qualitative information gathered from verbal and written responses to the attached questionnaires (see appendix). The questionnaires were completed by staff responsible for the implementation of these programs within the schools as well as trained student mediators.

The following criteria was used to select schools with peer mediation programs:

1. The peer mediation was conducted by students working in pairs without teacher intervention.
2. Students were neutral towards the disputants and did not give suggestions.
3. Disputants were allowed to tell their story in full.
4. Negotiation took place that enabled disputants to work towards a solution.

In order to find and interview schools, a number of high profile mediation agencies and trainers were contacted to obtain a list of schools that were involved in peer mediation programs. As there were no formal lists of schools running peer mediation programs, this was the most practical and efficient method of obtaining respondents. The majority of these schools had outside trainers conduct the training onsite at the school, or trained teachers (through outside training courses) to conduct the program. Permission was sought from these sources to contact the various schools for the purposes of the study. From the resulting list, fifteen secondary schools and fifteen primary schools were selected from a cross-section of country, provincial and city areas around Victoria, including both Government and non-Government institutions (see schools list in appendix). The researchers are satisfied that this was a sufficient sample to accurately reflect the experiences of Victorian schools involved in the implementation of Peer Mediation Programs.

It was intended to conduct a face-to-face interview with each of the respondents to complete the questionnaires. While most of the questionnaires were completed in this manner, some of the responses were received in written form. The questions were designed to be open-ended with minimal prompting, thus providing an opportunity for the interviewer to gather additional information which could be incorporated into the study.

We developed three separate questionnaires. The first questionnaire was designed for the person who instigated the Peer Mediation Program within the school, usually the school's Student Welfare Coordinator. The second questionnaire was answered by another person at that school who was also involved in the program (i.e, the principal, the deputy principal, a year level coordinator or a teacher). The third questionnaire was answered by either one or two of the school's Student Mediators.

Results obtained from the questionnaires have been summarised under each question and a number of direct quotes have been used to illustrate the findings.

At the time of publication, the researchers are not aware of any other large-scale research within Australia in the area of peer mediation. This study does not attempt to draw direct comparisons against existing overseas research. It is believed that Australian schools operate in a vastly different environment to schools that have peer mediation in such countries as the United States.

It is hoped that this research report provides a rich source of information and a snapshot of peer mediation as it currently exists. In years to come it may well serve as a useful benchmark for measuring how far peer mediation has either progressed or regressed.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

“How did the program first get thought about at your school?”

Secondary Schools

There was no consistent approach to implementing a peer mediation program for the first time. Interest appears to have been generated for peer mediation within schools through many sources including networking with other student welfare coordinators at various educational meetings, direct approach from welfare agencies wanting to trial a program, teachers attending individual mediation/conflict resolution courses, or by reading articles that appeared in the local media.

It does however seem that schools were more often persuaded into introducing a peer mediation program after hearing reports from other schools who had already implemented the program.

“I had made contact through the SWC network. () was doing peer mediation training and we talked about it.....”*

“I guess it was about four years ago that the SWC coordinators in this area have a network and peer mediation was being talked about.”

“Our SWC went to an in-service and brought back the idea which went through our management and welfare team and we felt it was quite a good idea as another tact in the way to discipline kids and to support them to support themselves rather than us doing it all.”

“The program first got thought of after a member of the welfare committee brought a newspaper article about it to a welfare meeting.”

“I think it came from a welfare coordinator in the past who went to a conference and heard (a speaker) and we decided to go from there.”

*SWC – Student Welfare Coordinator

Primary Schools

Primary schools were very similar in the manner in which they introduced peer mediation; often on the basis of reports from other schools, lectures they had attended, media reports, etc.

Evidence suggests that whilst peer mediation may be becoming widespread within schools, there appear to be no formal channels or structures in place to alert schools to this particular program. Word-of-mouth appears to play an important role in increasing the number of peer mediation programs.

“I was introduced to the peer mediation process when I was at college doing a graduate diploma in student welfare.”

“I heard about it through the media then spoke with someone.....”

“The school was looking for something to aid in minor playground disputes. I attended a seminar that was being run on peer mediation.”

“Through a conference I attended at which peer mediation was discussed, I then brought the idea back to the staff.”

“We were aware of other schools within the district who had tried the program...”

“School culture before a peer mediation program was introduced”

Secondary Schools

There was a high level of agreement that peer mediation was introduced due to what schools refer to as on-going “minor” incidents. These incidents are difficult to deal with and have the potential to involve many other students over long periods of time. Schools also indicated that education cuts had accounted for more overcrowding of classrooms and lack of resources, putting more pressure

on all aspects of school life. Respondents often referred to a lack of space for children within the school to play or meet in.

Anecdotal evidence from respondents suggests schools are both aware of and concerned about bullying between students, heightened by recent media attention and publicity. Many schools had undertaken internal surveys asking their students about bullying issues. Schools are concerned that many forms of bullying are not easy to detect, and students are unwilling to report such incidents for fear of being singled-out by other students. Peer mediation is seen as one program to curb early signs of bullying behaviour.

“Your passive harassment and your passive bullying is so much harder to detect and to work with.....”

“There was some bullying, some name calling, there was a lot of that girl stuff where girls fall out with each other particularly at late year 7, early year 8.”

“Yes, squabbles. Squabbles over boyfriends, squabbles over who slighted whom at the party on Saturday night or who didn’t speak to whom on the way home from school and so and so stole my friend or my friend’s not talking to me anymore or she’s got my socks from P.E.; that sort of stuff.”

“What we found was that staff and form teachers in particular were spending a lot of time, on top of everything else, dealing with a lot of superficial bickering between students.”

“I was certainly aware that there was a level of harassment, every school has harassment. The schools that say they don’t have it, have got their eyes closed, It’s in the nature of the beast.”

“It was inclusive of concepts such as, non talk by males around issues of relationship and sexuality, ‘big boys don’t cry’; them and us, solutions resolved through physical or stand-over tactics.”

“More authoritarian, more detention, punishment in relation to student tiffs.”

Schools have begun to recognise that students are often best placed to assist other students experiencing conflict. This philosophy is in line with schools wanting students to be more involved.

“And because I had in the back of my mind that students by and large, because of the Australian no dob concept, weren’t telling teachers about it and in fact they would deny it. Whereas if you gave them a chance to speak openly about it without having to put their name on it, that we might come up with some interesting things.”

“One of our mission statements is that kids ought to take increasing responsibility for their actions and so it fits under that sort of – “how do you do that?”

“.....I guess that it was the students working with other students to solve these problems because I think students are actually much more creative and inventive in picking up solutions.”

Primary Schools

Primary schools reported that yard duty teachers were often called upon to settle all disputes no matter how minor. Overcrowding in primary schools and a lack of resources were also mentioned as reasons why a higher level of disputes appear to be occurring.

“The usual niggling things, like dobbing and the little incidents like; he took the ball off her or he changed the rules of the game.”

“.....resulted in a much larger school which has resulted in children from a wider area and range of backgrounds attending.....”

“.....we have done a lot of behaviour management programs, assertive discipline, bullying, harassment within the school. We just felt this was an additional program we could add to the programs and procedures already in place.”

“We had some concerns with regard to the smaller children not being able to solve their own problems and felt that the teachers seemed to solve all their problems for them. We wanted to encourage the children to solve their own problems.”

“The school is generally a very good school, with none of the problems that some other schools seem to have. But nonetheless I think we had sufficient fighting and numbers of children attending detention and so forth to warrant a change in the culture about how to solve our conflicts that we have with other people.”

There was a recognition within primary schools that children are often unable to work out which incidents need to go to the teacher. Primary schools acknowledged that students are valuable in assisting students to help others.

“.....we thought that some of the little issues that often creep up in schools, thing like jealousy and issues of friendship groups etc, could be better handled through a peer mediation process.”

“Who first supported the idea of peer mediation being introduced into the school?”

Secondary Schools

Whilst peer mediation was often first introduced by the welfare coordinator, support was usually sought from year level coordinators around both implementation of the program and how it should be run. Once year level coordinators supported the program, the support of both the principal/ vice principal and/or administration was sought. This approval process was perceived as a key step in introducing peer mediation.

“The coordinators all supported it because I think, they saw it as a supplementary assistance scheme for them. The principals all supported it so there wasn’t ever any anti-feeling to it.”

“It was certainly supported by the principal and I think that was the key.”

“The student welfare coordinator brought the idea to me, I said, sounds fantastic, let’s do it. You talk to staff at the next staff meeting, we’ll see who can get on board.....”

However a sticking point, in supporting the program came from some year level coordinators who were concerned about students handling conflict situations.

“There was this notion that the coordinators needed to know everything that went on, whereas the process of mediation ought to be the capacity for the kids to come and say we’ve got this issue and we don’t necessarily want anyone else to know about it and that was a bit of a sticking point.....”

“.....that there would be that fear that is was being handed over to the kids to sort out and there wouldn’t be real solutions found and so on.....”

“Certainly the Year 7 coordinator this year is very supportive, other coordinators particularly the higher ones feel inclined to sort things out in their own way.”

“It makes wonderful logical sense in theory but in practice sometimes it becomes difficult to implement. Probably because there are wider issues to be considered, such as the extent to which some teachers are prepared to trust students to resolve these difficult issues.”

Primary School

Introduction into primary schools often involved an initial talk during a full staff meeting with flow on approval being sought from the principal. In many instances, school councils and parents were presented with the idea to enlist their support.

“It was originally supported by the staff. We talked a lot about it at staff meetings.”

“ I introduced it to staff at a full staff meeting and had a speaker come out.”

“Staff and parents on the school board were all spoken to about the program initially and seemed very keen.”

“Notes were placed in the school newsletter to inform the community what was happening.”

“When you thought about introducing peer mediation, what resources were allocated?”

Secondary schools

Although schools were keen on peer mediation training, a re-occurring theme was the cost to the school. This appears to have been a major concern both at the time of training and when considering future programs. A number of schools were able to obtain an agency to run the program at either a reduced cost or free of charge, also a number of schools applied for a small grant. The biggest financial constraint that schools reported was the “time” allocation for teachers to run the program.

“I did the training myself first in my own time and lunchtime and my SWC time and (outside organisation) assisted me with that free for about three years.”

“There was no extra time given, just part of my brief, anything you were willing to take on you would do for nothing.”

There was clearly a concern about future funding of programs as they compete with the need for other resources within the school.

“I don’t know how the program is going to continue, now and even last year we had very little to allocate, because a decision was made to allocate most of the money we received, which was thousands of dollars (Victorian Equity Program) for setting up the school with computers, whereas before that a lot of this money had been used for individual programs that were designed to create equity.....”

Primary Schools

Primary schools faced major problems in gaining class release time for teachers to attend and/or run programs. Primarily, schools used relief CRT (Casual Relief Teachers) funding to release teachers from their normal classroom duties. Some

schools used other innovative ways of releasing teachers by training the equivalent of one full grade level and allocating the remaining students into other classes.

“Time wise I was released for two days from my classroom so there was CRT there.”

“Not sure where the money was found.....it was a large time commitment mainly.....”

“Very little resources were allocated, though it was well supported and we did receive a very tiny budget for the program.”

“Funding was allocated but this did not cover the cost of training. We pledged to provide ongoing funding for the cost of the program, and added this to the submission. Next year we will apply for funding again, but we do not know if this will be successful. We will also set aside money in the school budget for costs as above.”

“I think one of the days was funded by extra funds which we applied to the Education department for. The other organisation which was needed I did in my own time.”

“Describe your selection process in choosing peer mediators for the program.”

Secondary School

Schools chose students at either Years 9, 10 or 11. (or a combinations of two year levels). Year 12 students were generally not selected due to perceived higher work load. There was also a suggestion that at around the Year 9 and 10 level, peer mediation provides an opportunity to develop leadership skills within the school.

The selection processes normally involved an SWC, in consultation with the year level coordinators, for the students being selected. A theme running through the

selection of students was that they were essentially “good kids”. This seemed to be part of being a ‘good citizen’ or ‘good role model’ approach within the schools.

Selection of students went from reasonably unstructured i.e., “Who do you think would make a good mediator?” to formal applications required from students wishing to apply as mediators.

Gender was also an issue in many schools, with girls keen to make themselves available to become a peer mediators. Boys were far more reluctant, and were more likely to be coerced into the program.

“The mediators need to apply and they have to give us three reasons as to why they should be considered as mediators, and if we end up with too many applicants we’ve undertaken an interview process....”

“It might have been a very general notice on the bulletin and asking the year level coordinator to nominate a few students that we could then approach.”

“I guess it tends to be the better kids, but there’s a recognition that some of the kids that you would like to be in the program are in fact ones who either have been bullied or are likely to be the bullies or the ones who are loud and maybe aggressive and so on and they are not struck off the list simply because of that behaviour, but equally we haven’t gone out of our ways to say; this is necessary for you to be a part of because it will change your ways.”

“The kids selected are at the end of year 9 and only do mediation for the one year in year 10. We find that you can’t really train more than about twenty because you can’t effectively give them all a go if there’s any more, and it’s a year 10 thing....”

“The students applied and we selected twenty of the applicants. It was a variety of kids who applied and we didn’t pick the goody goodies in the school, we picked kids who we thought other students respected and weren’t necessarily good academically.”

Primary Schools

A variety of methods were used to select children for the program. Issues taken into consideration included whether the staff thought the children could cope with mediation skills and that they had reasonable literacy skills. A number of schools used peer mediation training to give school captains, class captains, etc., a more responsible role within the school. Overall, classroom teachers played a major role in the selection of students for the program.

Primary schools were keen upon ensuring that a broad range of children were given an understanding of peer mediation before the selection process. Often information was sent home to parents, to discuss with their children whether they would like to be part of the program.

Students selected were generally from either Grade 5 or Grade 6 with occasionally some Grade 4 students selected. The year level chosen often reflected the time of year that the program was run, e.g., if later in the year, it was more likely that Grade 5's were trained. Gender was not an issue in primary schools, who found it easy to balance male and female student numbers.

“All children in years 5 & 6 were trained, after which the program was again explained to them, including what their role would be. If they then wished to go on and become a mediator, they needed to apply.”

“We made the program available to children from year 4-6. We spoke with the children in these classes who were then either put forward by their teachers or put themselves forward. From here we tried to achieve a gender balance and a balance across grade levels.”

“Mediators are trained at the end of grade 5 and this is open to any grade 5.”

“We selected children who we thought would cope well with the training and with the mediations.”

“Initially the children were invited to express their interest, and were then given a pro-forma with some questions asking children about their skills in particular areas.”

“How did you come to do this training program?”

Secondary Students

“I applied because I had a bit of problems over the past four years in 7 to 10 and I was pretty much a bad kid and I thought yeah, I’ll have a go, turn my ways around and I decided school was for school and not for playing around and (teacher) and I were pretty close so she was always helping me and I decided I’ll give something back because I’ve always taken it.”

“(SWC) was walking around at the end of last year and she was asking if people were interested. I asked her about it and she told me that it was about helping the younger students resolve their problems and I thought it would be really interesting.”

“We applied and I think there was a bit of a selection process.”

“The school offers it every year in November for year 9 students going into year 10, so I applied for it and basically in the application we had to say why we think we should be mediators, what we could offer etc.”

“We were both selected by the teachers.”

“We were asked if anyone who was interested in the program would put their name down and they just selected a few. I suppose they wanted a range of people.”

Primary Students

“() was a captain so he was automatically chosen. I was picked because they needed four other responsible children for the positions of mediators.”

“Last year someone came to our grade to train our whole grade and people who thought that they wanted to do it, could.”

“We just had to put our name on a list and if they thought we were the right person then they picked us.”

“We were just asked in our grade if we wanted to do it and I’d just seen it on A Current Affair, so I thought I might like to try it out.”

“We volunteered. We had to write a letter and we were chosen from the letter.”

“We started this in school and a note came home saying that you had to write something about why you wanted to be a peer mediator and if you got through that you got into the training.....”

“Describe the training program that you ran?”

Secondary Schools

A two day program was most commonly used by schools to train students. Where possible, schools attempted to make the training feel special for students by running sessions away from school, allowing students free dress during the training, and providing a celebratory lunch at some stage of the program.

Informational sessions to wider groups of students were also used to generate interest and short refresher courses were used for students following programs to increase the students knowledge and skill base.

Many programs were run by outside trainers brought into the school specifically for the program.

“.....a three day program to start with which was incredibly long and then last year the middle school coordinator and I wrote our own program and ran it for two days.”

“Two days generally, two full days and I take them out as a group to the local community house and I usually get somebody in to do it.....”

“The kids had a two day training session so the kids who were trained last year, they also had a refresher course this year.....”

“.....spent four mornings, about three and a half hours each training students for peer mediation.....returned to basically refresh students on the process.”

Primary Schools

Primary schools also used a variety of techniques to train children, often over a two-day period. Some schools also broke programs down to suit their time-tabling.

“The program was run for two days with the grade six children.”

“The training program was for four mornings, off campus, due to the small numbers. This would not be possible if we needed to train large numbers of students.”

“Training was done over six weeks, half a day a week.”

“Training is about a full day of theory, role playing and about a week of hands-on experience with the year 6 children.”

“Of trained mediators, did any choose not to continue and how long will peer mediators offer their services to the school?”

Secondary Schools

A high percentage of students continued with peer mediation at the school. The main reason for non-participation was students leaving or moving schools. Some students fell away due to losing interest in the program (i.e., schools did not refer enough students to mediation to keep them interested). A few schools mentioned issues such as “I have too much else to do.”

“Two of our mediators have left the school to go overseas....”

“One boy in particular was a bit of a loudmouth and bit of a kid who would get into a few scrapes and we thought it would be good for him, the skill and self esteem stuff; but he found it very hard to take the program seriously when we were doing it.”

“I think she found it hard because she wanted to give advice and when I explained to her that is not what peer mediation is about, she felt she thought it would be too hard for her to do it.....”

“If they dropped out at all it would be because they have got too many other interests and they’ll come and say, “I’m sorry I can’t handle it, I’ve got too many things on my plate” so that’s one and the other perhaps they are not being used enough, so they are going to get bored.”

The use of mediators was dependent upon how the campuses were set up and the resources available. Where there were year levels from years 7 until 12, schools opted to train Year 10 mediators who mediated at Year 10 and often until the end of Year 11. Schools commonly made it optional for students once in year 12 to mediate.

“We can use the students for three years if they are trained in Year 10, obviously two if trained in Year 11, but we try to limit the interruption to Year 12 class times as much as possible. It depends on the availability of mediators at the time.”

“We would hope they would be mediators for Year 10 and Year 11 and if possible be called on, if needed in Year 12.”

“The mediators are expected to offer their services for two years, that is in Year 11 and 12.”

“They are usually only used in Year 10 although I have had some kids who have been really keen and said “Oh, do we have to finish doing it at the end?”; and I’ve said, No, if you still want to go on the mediation roster next year.”

Primary Schools

Students in primary schools were keen to continue with the program. Similar reasons were cited for discontinuing with the program, including boredom due to lack of referrals or moving schools.

“Some children choose not to continue, as they cannot commit to the program, they would rather be off playing cricket, etc.”

“To my knowledge none have chosen not to continue. We have had to remind some people and get them back on track occasionally, but none have said they do not wish to participate anymore.”

“Three or four chose not to continue. Two were lacking in confidence after they had completed the training, one chose not to continue as they were going away, and one person chose to do the training, but was unable to because of absence, so will train next year.”

Primary schools generally trained Grade 5 and/or Grade 6 students which determined the length of service.

“The children only mediate while they are in Grade 6.”

“We envisage that the mediators will participate in the program from the time of training in Year 5 through year 6.”

“This will be up to the children; they will be given the opportunity to continue, if they choose not to; this is fine.”

“Children in Grade 5 can mediate for the two years if they choose to.”

“What was the training like?”

Secondary Students

“It was a lot of fun. It wasn’t all that complicated.”

“The training was quite insightful, it was a lot to take in, there was a lot of information you had to learn over the course, but it was a lot of information that was handy.”

“Very thorough. It was interesting, it went for two days which involved steps to go through, the process of mediation.”

“It was fun. We only spent three days doing it and it was fun to do. We went through what mediation was and we saw a video as you couldn’t picture it in your head.”

“The training was very helpful and enjoyable at the same time. “

“The training was extremely beneficial as it was practical, formal and was presented in a manner which was easily understandable. It also allowed for communication between teachers, students and the trainer.”

Primary Students

“It was a two day training program which was pretty hard and we got a bit restless because the weather was very hot.”

“It was good training. It was easy. It was just filling out sheets and asking questions about what we would do and stuff.”

“We had to go down to the community centre for the training, where we practised mediating with a partner. The training was every Monday from 9am till lunchtime, and then we’d come back up to the school and finish our school work.”

“It was good. Sometimes it was really hard. But we learnt a lot from it.”

“It was fun, some activities were challenging and we had to cooperate a lot with other people in the group and we were all mixed so we couldn’t be with our friends, that was a bit harder.”

“We had two different forms of training. One of them was actually going out with the year above us, the current peer mediators and actually doing a hands on job listening and watching them solve a problem. And then we had another one where the grade 6’s would put on a role play for us and we took notes.”

“It was quite difficult because when you are the mediator, either mediator one or two, and there are two people sitting on the other side of the table and they are arguing you are not allowed to yell at them. You just have to say; “calm down, there’s no need to be like this.” “You have to hold your temper and try and not explode.”

“Have the completed mediation sessions run within the school guidelines?”

Secondary Schools

In all cases, mediators adhered to school guidelines in terms of confidentiality and what may be discussed within the mediation process itself. There were no reports of breaches by mediators in running sessions.

“We generally allow a period for a mediation (approximately 50 minutes) and they generally run within that time. We say that there should only be two people to be mediated at one time and if there are other extras and add-ins that they are done separately. Generally the add-ins or extras might take another half period but the core dispute is dealt with first and then the friends of the disputants might be brought in to confirm or deny and that seems to work quite well.”

“.....sometimes by the time kids come to mediation they’ve made the agreement with each other beforehand and so the need is less great but it affirms whatever they should do.”

“They’ve stuck pretty well to safe areas and there are some areas which the school would be saying aren’t for mediation; certain degrees of violence or nastiness whatever. Those are issues that would directly go to the administration to be sorted out that way.”

“The students know the boundaries of confidentiality and the subjects of discussion that they are not allowed to mediate on within the school situation.”

Primary Schools

Schools reported that sessions consistently adhered to school guidelines. No major concerns were raised in this area.

“Sessions run within school guidelines and students know when to refer issues to teachers.”

“The mediators have clear guidelines. They know not to try to break up fights and such. If any situation is too big and outside their limits they are to refer to a teacher immediately by sending a runner back.”

“There have been one or two occasions when relieving or new staff have referred things to mediation, which actually require teacher intervention. These issues have been referred back to the teacher concerned (by the mediators).”

“Did the training make you feel confident in becoming a mediator?”

Secondary Students

“Definitely, even as a career.”

“Yes, the trainer was good. He showed us what to do, so everyone knew and he kept telling us to be confident in what we were doing.”

“It helped me to think and cope with difficult situations.”

“...because when you first hear about it you think, “oh geez could I actually do that?” and when you go through the training you think it’s so easy to do.”

“I was confident all along about becoming a mediator as I like helping other people.”

“Fairly confident. I think you’re not absolutely confident until you actually do one and then you think; “I know what’s going on here.”

Primary Students

“When I actually first started I thought, “How am I going to remember it all?”, but after the training days and then the first time I mediated it was pretty fine.”

“Yes, it was cool.”

“Yes it was good because if we wanted to ask a question all we had to do was ask it and person who was training us would answer our questions for us which was really good, because if we wanted to know anything we could find it out easily.”

“I felt really confident and more confident about myself because I knew more and could deal with things.”

“Yes, it pushed you to your best.”

“How many mediation sessions have you run?”

Secondary Schools

The number of mediations conducted varied from school to school. However, it ranged from as few as 7-8 for the entire year, through to 20-30 per term. The majority of schools however believed that they ran at least one mediation on average per week.

“They range from about 18-34 per year, we don’t have a huge number and some terms there’s none. Second term this year there were none. But what happened second term was that two of our coordinators were ill and there was simply no time and most people who were doing things were doing things in the shortest possible way rather than the thorough and caring problem solving way. It was to do with the expediency of teacher time. It very much effects the use of the process.”

“We would probably do one a week and it’s mainly used by years 7-9. The feedback is that there has not been a need in year 11 or 12. And the year 10’s don’t go for it very much.”

“About one a week within the last 12 months.”

“Over a three year period, on an average of 20-30 mediation’s per term.”

Primary Schools

Although mediation sessions are referred directly, primary schools tended to average from one or two sessions per week, to six individual mediation sessions on one day.

“On average there would be one mediation session each lunch time and play time every day.”

“This term I have not been doing it as I have been very limited in my time and have not been able to oversee the program. The rest of the year we probably have a minimum of one mediation per lunch time, up to a maximum of four per lunch time.”

“On average, perhaps one or two per week.”

“The sessions run every day with an average of approximately three per day.”

“I would say there have been three or four for the whole year.”

“Give me some examples of what has been referred to mediation?”

Secondary Schools

The most recognised examples of conflicts going to mediation involved issues around friendship between students, name calling, rumours and exclusion within a group.

“Verbal harassment, name calling, put downs, disputes over space and property e.g., pushing and shoving in the corridors and at lockers, those sort of things.”

“A lot to do with teasing of each other but teasing of equals rather than bullying or ganging up or picking on one victim. Frequently after fights, particularly boys who have been fighting, they need to be able to find their way back to how they can get along with each other. Broken friendships are the biggest, broken trusts, “you’ve said this about -----, you’ve betrayed my word or my secrets, those sort of things, so mainly shifts of friendship.”

“...yes it seems to be that the girls have accessed it more...”

“Name calling, the rumours, pushing one another’s books to the floor.”

“A school refusal was mediated with the kids that were giving her a hard time.”

“Overuse of the basketball court at lunch time, a couple of kids feuding in a local street and the families were starting to get involved.....”

“We had one where two girls had been really good friends and one of the girls mothers had been told by somebody that her daughter was smoking marijuana and one of the girls believed it was her friend who had told her mother, it hadn’t been but there was a big conflict...”

“One girl had broken up with her boyfriend but her best friend had been with him on the weekend and there was this loyalty issue.”

Primary Schools

Teasing and name calling constituted the majority of mediations dealt with at the primary school level.

“Children who can’t play together because they can’t agree on the rules. Children interfering in others’ games. Often they are minor incidents of children just not getting along.”

“Basically small things; he took my ball, she keeps following me around the yard, he won’t play with me, that sort of thing.”

“Children not sharing, children not letting others play, name calling, dispute over game rules, disputes over teams.”

“Territorial things, lying, friendships.”

“He’s chasing me, he won’t leave me alone, the boys won’t let the girls play cricket, they won’t let me play, he’s teasing me.”

“Arguing over equipment, use of areas within the yard.....”

“Are there written agreements for mediation? If so, where are they stored and who has access to them?”

Secondary Schools

The program organiser (i.e., SWC) commonly kept a copy of the agreements on record, and the students in dispute also were given a copy once checked. Agreements were often checked by a teacher to ensure that they were livable and fell within school guidelines. Not all schools however, gave students a copy of the agreement. Access was restricted to the viewing of agreements by teachers, and no school generally reported more than a handful of people who may have needed to know the outcome.

“A copy is kept by the student welfare coordinator, the relevant year level coordinator and the students concerned.”

“A copy of the agreement is given to the students involved and only those students would have access to them.”

“Whichever year level coordinator organised the mediation, they keep the file, the students don’t get a copy.”

“Students are not given a copy of any agreement. A copy is kept stored in the students file and I also keep a copy of same. The coordinators, teachers and myself would have access to the files.”

Primary Schools

Primary schools tended to consider mediated agreements confidential, with most schools storing agreements on file with primarily the coordinator having access.

“There are written agreements which are stored in the peer mediation file, and that is kept with me. I am the only person who has access to this file.

“There are written agreements, a copy of which is kept by the school and written in the mediation book.”

“.....written agreement is photocopied, the two participants each receive a copy and I keep a copy on my files. This enables me to determine whether or not the same children are re-referred.”

“The agreements are left in a folder on the table and every so often I empty the contents because they are confidential. I have access to the agreements but I don’t read them unless I have to.”

“How is the program run and publicised within the school?”

Secondary Schools

There were a wide range of strategies used among schools in running their peer mediation program. There was a division amongst schools as to whether the program should be well publicised or whether the mediators should keep a low profile. Where the program has a low profile, schools reporting referrals to mediation were not particularly forthcoming.

Publicity for the program included the following strategies:

- Presenting “peer mediator” badges and certificates and/or references to students at a school assembly
- Recognition in the school newsletter through articles either written by staff and/or trained peer mediators

- An external speaker presenting peer mediation as a concept to staff.
- Students presenting a mock mediation to staff and/or school council.
- Speaker(s) at a general and/or year level assemblies talking about peer mediation.
- Peer mediators visiting individual classes and presenting peer mediation through both a role play demonstration and explanation, (particularly to year levels 7 & 8 in secondary and preps through to Grade 4 in primary)
- Sending information home to parents explaining peer mediation and encouraging them to get their children to use the process.
- Displaying the peer mediators photos in a prominent place within the school.
- Displaying the names of peer mediators on the student welfare notice board in the staff room.
- Using photos of peer mediators being trained in the school magazine.
- Presentation of peer mediation during orientation sessions for Grade 6 students entering secondary school.
- Displaying posters around the school and in the coordinators offices advertising peer mediation.
- Bringing in the local community newspaper to run an article on the training done.
- Including information on peer mediation on the school web site.

“The peer mediators are presented with badges at a formal assembly at the middle school level because we train them in Year 10.....They are also recognised in the newsletter on the bulletin and in the school magazine, and then I take photographs of when the training takes place and those photographs are displayed in the foyer for a while.”

“The students are introduced at assembly and they wear a badge and over in the Year 7 area we have got photos of the mediators up with their names.”

“There would be regular things on the student bulletin about peer mediation so hopefully everyone understood what it was all about and how it could be accessed.”

“They are listed in the (staff) bulletin each week; who the two peer mediators are that are on duty so they are profiled that way. We’ve got referral books in the general staff room and in each of the coordinators’ staff rooms for people to write referrals in and then on a Thursday morning before school I collect them and bring them down to the office where we have a mediation room set up in there, which is going to be redecorated next year, and that’s where they spend Thursday. They look at how many mediations they’ve got and if they’ve got a test period they’ll go and do their tests and come back and finish them. They have authorisation to bring the kids out of class and return them back to class. (usually Years 7 to 9).”

“Program isn’t really publicised as students prefer to remain anonymous but it is well documented in code of conduct and student management practices and handouts.”

“But there would still be a lot of kids here who don’t know what peer mediation is, even though they have had that initial introduction last year. A lot of it really falls down to advertising. You’ve really got to advertise really hard and you’ve got to have the time to do that. You don’t need the money, you need the time.”

“Got them badges, they didn’t want to wear them whereas the Year 11’s and 12’s can’t wait to get a badge and wear it. A couple of them did but some of them would have it under their jumper.....”

Primary Schools

Primary schools opted to run mediations during the lunchtime break, where mediations are directly referred by either the yard duty teacher or students approaching the mediators themselves.

Badges or coloured clothing is worn by the mediators so they can be recognised by the students coming to mediation. The use of runners (not trained mediators) was also adopted by many schools, where a student walked with the yard duty teacher and whose role was to accompany the disputing students to the mediators. Schools generally either opted to have mediators positioned in one area e.g., a table set up near the staff room or just outside the building. Some

schools have mediators wandering around the yard approaching students who they think may need their assistance.

When publicising the program within the school, similar strategies were used as per the list of secondary strategies. Perhaps one exception was to encourage students to attend mediation (particularly lower grades i.e., prep to Grade 3). Students were given a sticker on completion of the mediation (i.e., I am a good listener, I work well, I try hard, etc). Given out by the peer mediators.

“The children have badges which are worn when on duty. We also have runners who are grade 3 students, and these students walk with the teacher on yard duty for half of recess/half of lunch. If there are issues which arise during this time, the runner’s role is to escort the children to the mediators on duty. The teacher provides a ticket which says peer mediation.....”

“The children wear a bib similar to a netballer, which says ‘peer mediator’. They set up in the hall with all the books, resources etc, they may need. It is announced at the beginning of the week who is on duty and timetables are displayed around the school, so student’s know who is on duty. The mediators are usually around the netball court and if students wish to see them, they can just go up and talk to them.”

“The children wear badges designed by themselves, and they also display their own advertisements around the school. Role modeling was done at assembly and mediators also attended each class and spoke about their roles.”

“How well do students at this school know about mediation?”

Secondary Students

“It’s not known enough to people and we’ve got to change that.”

“I mean some of them know about it and request to have a mediation and I think others are actually asked if they’d like one and they don’t know what it is.”

“The word did get around after we finished the course. They do have a good knowledge of it now, they know there are mediators in this school.”

“Well, we’ve been around to all year levels and this year we had a thing with the Year 8 class captains so they could promote it in their year level and their classes, and it’s in the bulletin every day trying to make them all aware of it.”

“The younger students know because they have been told, the older students; they know about it, but they don’t really want to know about it that much because it’s not really needed for them, they think.”

“A lot of the Year 7’s know about it. People generally know about it.”

“I think that all year levels have been told about it, but how much they actually know I’m not sure.”

Primary Students

“() spoke about it at assembly, so basically the whole school knows and if a child comes up to a teacher on duty with a minor problem that teacher will send the child to peer mediation.”

“They know about it because there’s regular announcements saying there’s peer mediation in the hall and they learn about it.”

“They know all about it because we went to each classroom last year and introduced it.”

“Pretty well, but they don’t really come to us to work out things unless it’s a big problem. But they all know about it.”

“We did a role play in assembly to show everyone what we’re wearing so everyone knows.”

“I think everybody has been at least once, whether it was a real issue or just to check it out. So quite a few people know the process.”

“What de-briefing and/or on-going training do mediators receive after mediation?”

Secondary Schools

Overall there does not appear to be a formal de-brief for mediators by schools. However, often a student welfare person, coordinator, etc, will make themselves available to de-brief with the mediators following their session.

On-going training for established mediators is considered important, however finding the time to conduct sessions remains difficult.

“I have to say it’s quick and lively because it’s usually the end of lunchtime so one of us will be here and say; “How did that go, was it hard?” “Did you find it frustrating?” or did they feel a sense of achievement or something like that?”

“Nothing usually, they just come and let me know how it went when they bring up the agreements to be typed.”

“They come and see me and talk about it, they always do.”

“I meet with them twice a term and look to see what is happening for them and see how things are going.”

“Mediators receive some on-going training, especially in being co-facilitators in training the next group of teachers and students, as part of the planning and training for these programs.”

“No, they haven’t, to be honest. They’ve been trained those two days and that’s been it.”

Primary Schools

De-briefing is uncommon on a formal basis in primary schools. Teachers let students know that they can be approached at any time after a mediation session

to de-brief. A number of schools run a general de-brief session every month or so where all mediators get together to generally discuss cases and any other problems they may be experiencing. Finding the time for these meetings was raised as a common concern.

“No specific de-briefing, can come and talk with me at any time.”

“No formal de-briefing as such. Often I speak to them after the session as they are taking off their t-shirts and just enquire as to how the session went.”

“All mediation records are viewed by the school welfare forum, which consists of four teachers, and they would speak to any mediators they felt needed to discuss any session.”

“No formal debriefing is done, other than the weekly meeting at which some training and skills are reinforced.”

“We have a revamp whenever needed. We might show the video again, participate in some more role plays etc.”

“We try to meet regularly but this is becoming increasingly difficult, and we need to work on this area.”

“When you finish a mediation session who do you debrief with?”

Secondary Students

“I debrief with the vice-principal and the peer mediation coordinator. We basically tell them how we went and how things happened and what they said.”

“The other mediator mainly and we just talk to the SWC.”

“The person I did the mediation with. If I feel I need to say any more, I’ll go to my welfare coordinator but usually I haven’t had to do that.”

“Nobody except for my fellow mediator. We have a small talk about the mediation with each other afterwards.”

"We usually see the SWC as we have to get the contracts copied and then we go back and see the kids."

Primary Students

"We can talk to the coordinator anytime."

"We have a book and we write the conversation and outcome in and we have a contract and things and we just tell our coordinator what happened and what type of problem it was and what we did about it and what happened at the end."

"We don't. We are not allowed to talk to anyone about it, only () and that's only if we have a problem. She gets the signed sheet with the agreement on it."

"I can say to my friends, "Oh I had a hard problem today or it was a bit boring today, nobody came; but I don't discuss with them what was actually said."

"At the start of the year we talked to the teachers a lot, but now because we are used to it and we are really confident with it, we don't usually need much help at all from the teachers."

"Yes, that's what the meeting is for every week. We talk about what happened and how people have been listening and how people have been cooperating and how it's all going."

"What support are you offered as a mediator?"

Secondary Students

"As a mediator if we have any problems, being only students, we have a chance to go and see a teacher involved and they'll help us out or they'll come and sit in the mediation if the children aren't cooperative."

"The teachers concerned are really easy to talk to."

“They give us a lot of encouragement and we try to tell them as much as we can about what we did so they can offer us advice as to how to go about it differently if there’s a better way of dealing with it.”

“They give us a fair bit of support but they also give us a bit of leeway.”

“There have been some where we have been stuck so we call on the SWC or one of the other trained teachers and they are always helpful if we come across problems.”

“Teachers are easy to talk to and are on the same level.”

“The SWC is easy to talk to and you tell the class teacher where you are going to be for the next two periods and they say; “What are you doing?”, and when you get back “Was it easy, was it hard?”. But they can’t ask detailed questions, but they just ask because they are interested.”

“If we have a problem, then they suggest other things we could do.”

Primary Students

“The teachers are very supportive, they give extra time after lunchtime if it cannot be resolved during the lunchtime break.”

“They are easy to talk to and if we think the problem is too big to mediate then it goes to a teacher but it is up to us to decide if we can mediate the problem or not. We are not allowed to mediate any physical fighting or anything.”

“() is very receptive to any queries I may have, and is always approachable.”

“We have got a question book and sometimes if we write a question in the book and when we have a meeting () answers them for us.”

“We can always talk to her about anything.”

“She listens to everything, she’s not one of those teachers that you have to jump down her throat, like you just talk to her and she answers your problems.”

“Does your school have any evaluation process in place for this program?”

Secondary Schools

There appears to be a movement towards more formal evaluation, however for many schools this is still in a developmental stage. The majority of schools use an on-going verbal evaluation of the mediations completed by talking to the mediators and participants. Also general feedback from other staff is used as part of an overall evaluation.

“In the sense that at the end of the year there is a school appraisal/evaluation so I had to do one for mediation. I did one last year and this year in terms of; “What have you achieved this year? Have you achieved what you wanted to? What are your plans for the future? What sort of problems have you encountered?..... that sort of stuff.”

“I usually evaluate just in terms of a quick survey type thing, suggestions for improvement to the program and that sort of thing. Formally I’ve discussed it with them....”

“It’s in the computer, I haven’t used it yet.”

“It’s mainly feedback from the kids that we use and in most cases we found that the problems that existed tend to either diminish or they just disappear.....”

“.....and looked at the global picture of what they have achieved and where they hoped to go, so there’s an effect of accountability and evaluation in that regard, but not at a student level.”

Primary Schools

Evaluation tends to be fairly informal and is often judged on comments from staff. All staff refer students during their yard duty times, and thus have a fair idea of how the program is operating.

“No formal evaluation process. The children are closely monitored and asked how they are going. There has been a marked decline in the number of names in the yard duty book, which has been a very positive aspect.”

“No formal evaluation process. I evaluate the program myself and speak about it to various people.”

“We are starting to formally evaluate the program now. To date it has been an informal evaluation in the form of comments made by staff, less detentions etc.”

“Is continually being revised through the year, though not a formal process as such.”

“Describe the referral process to your mediators?”

Secondary Schools

Referrals to the program are generally made by teachers through year level coordinators. However, many schools report that teachers are able to refer students directly to the mediation coordinator and are encouraged to do so. Self referrals by students themselves is also encouraged but tends to happen after one of the students may have been previously involved in a mediation session.

Many schools have attempted to make the referral process as simple as possible through the use of either a simple form or a verbal referral requiring no more than the names of students involved and a brief overview of the situation.

“A teacher or students themselves or coordinators can refer them to myself and we look at our list of mediators and see who has or hasn’t done mediation because we want to share the jobs around. We also look at the gender of the people concerned to choose the mediators and that’s how the selection process is made.”

“The year captains and the teachers can refer the students and the students themselves can request a mediation.”

“The students are generally referred by teachers directly contacting the SWC by saying, “I’ve noticed a problem going on between these particular students” and so I would then investigate that and see whether it was suitable for mediation.”

“The coordinators refer the students to me and then I do it. We do have a written form but quite often what I get is verbal. Then I assess the issue and decide whether it is for mediation or not. Issues where there have been physical violence are not meant to be mediated but sometimes we will use mediation after there’s been some other process. Eg Two kids might have had a physical fight and been suspended for that but we then might use mediation on their return so there’s a working in conjunction at times.”

Primary Schools

The majority of schools have the yard duty teacher refer disputing students to the mediators or allow disputing students to approach the mediators themselves. It appears that the longer the program has been in operation, the more students are confident in approaching the mediators to assist in solving disputes.

“Students can self refer, or other students may encourage them to attend mediation sessions if they see them quarrelling. Teachers can also refer students if necessary. Both or all students involved must attend the mediation process, one student is not able to ask for mediation if the other student refuses.”

“Usually self referral, sometimes the teacher will give the choice of mediation or teacher involvement.”

“The child in need of mediation is referred by the teacher on yard duty. The runners are then used to take the child to the mediators.”

“Referral can be made by a teacher or by other students, or by the students themselves.”

“From your understanding, what do you believe the level of satisfaction to be from your trained mediators?”

Secondary Schools

Whilst mediators reported a high level of satisfaction with the process and conducting mediation, there was an overwhelming response from schools that the peer mediators do not feel well utilised in having enough mediations referred to them. Schools report that it is still common for teachers to deal with conflicts and forget or ignore, that mediators are available.

“I would have to say they are not getting enough work. I would probably think it’s been frustrating and a disappointment to them.”

“If you train a large number and only get two or three mediations each it’s not a great chance to really polish their skills.”

“They love doing it, they would like to do more.”

“Some students are very anxious to get a mediation but aren’t available, or teachers won’t let them be released and you might request a couple of times and they don’t respond. Then you might move onto somebody else, so that it takes quite a while. A couple of students have felt that they wouldn’t do a mediation because they didn’t get offered one until second term because there was insufficient mediations. They work in pairs and there’s always got to be someone who’s done a mediation before, after the initial one, so it goes the first two mediators are bunnies (new), then the next time one of those students will be with a new person and the partner will be with another new person.”

“When we look at the survey results most of them say that the program’s very effective to effective. We ask them; “Do you feel your training was adequate? When 20 out of 22 said, yes, their training was adequate, they felt well supported and the others didn’t respond, so we don’t know whether it’s a ‘no’ or ‘don’t know’.. And we said; What would improve your preparation? and they all said everything went to plan.we probably had too many mediators (24) and there wasn’t enough work for them. So next year we’ll probably cut down the number and train about 15 or 16.”

Primary School

The schools that referred more heavily to the peer mediators achieved a higher level of satisfaction from them. The main frustration of mediators was not enough work being received. The level of satisfaction on completed mediations was high and students were enthusiastic.

“Mediators initially very keen. Interest has waned due to lack of referrals.”

“Mediators seem to love doing the sessions. Some children do not feel they are well utilised, so this lessens mediator satisfaction as such.”

“The mediators get plenty of work. In fact they are over satisfied now. Earlier in the piece they were really keen to do mediating but they are rostered more than enough. Now the numbers have gone down. They have days that I refer to as windy days when the work is constant and other occasional days when it is quiet. The mediators are available every day during lunch and play times. I found it was getting too much for them so I have shortened the time that they are available.”

“How long did you have to wait to get your first mediation?”

Secondary Students

“I’ve been one of the lucky ones. I have had about five in four weeks.”

“I think I had to wait about two to three weeks after the course was done. There may have been problems after that but that’s how long it took me.”

“I don’t know, about half a year or something.”

“A week or two.”

“Not long, maybe two months.”

"My first mediation occurred very soon after the training program. It was one of the first conducted at our school."

"About a week."

Primary Students

"I know we went around for two weeks telling the kids about how it's going to work and that, so I think our first mediation happened at about three weeks."

"Not that long really. A couple of days."

"We had to wait one week because it was just near the end of term 2 and we started doing it in the first week of term 3."

"I got mine the first day because me and my friend were the first ones on the roster."

"I had to wait about 3 months because we were available from the start of term 1 and the first mediation wasn't until term 2."

"How did you feel when you did your first mediation?"

Secondary Students

"I was a bit nervous at the start because it was the first one but as I got into it I relaxed a little more."

"I felt so nervous. You're there and thinking these people are expecting us to help them with whatever problem they have and are we doing a good job and what do they think of us?"

"I was confident and looked forward to completing my first mediation. No problems were encountered due to my knowledge and confidence of using the mediation skills."

"When I did my first mediation I felt very confident as I studied the procedures that I had been taught and had no worries at all."

“To be honest at first I was a bit nervous but once I started and concentrated on the task ahead of me, trying to help them out, I became more and more confident...”

Primary Students

“Yes I was a bit nervous.”

“We knew what we were going to do so we just did it. We weren’t nervous at all.”

“I was a bit nervous because I didn’t know what it was going to be like, but I quite like helping people now.”

“I felt a bit confident but it’s a bit hard because you don’t know if things will go ok or not. It’s pretty nerve wrecking a bit.”

“Pretty nervous, like when I got told, but once I got started it was easy.”

“It was pretty good because we argued a bit about who was going to be mediator one and two but then we worked it out because I like writing so I got to be mediator two.”

“My friend and I did two people and they were really hard to control because they were arguing every time someone said something and they’d say “no, that’s not true”; and it was really hard but eventually we got there and they sorted it out.”

“Has learning mediation skills made you treat people any differently?”

Secondary Students

“I’ve learnt different communication skills I never had and I’ve learnt to take things as neutral and not as a biased opinion. It’s been really helpful.”

“I suppose it has, um a little less scaring people cause you sort of get to know what people sort of fear when they get scared. When you’ve got brothers and sisters you fight with them a lot and it sort of helps you take that step back and look at things and think, “how can I resolve this?” It has been a good experience.”

"I think I listen a bit better. I think in my own friendship group when there's a bit of conflict, I try and see it from both sides."

"I don't know what people are going through but now after doing the course I know that people do have problems from all ages even though I sometimes think that adults mightn't have problems, but we all do."

"It gives you a sense of more of an understanding about how peoples feelings can be affected even when you don't realise it because most of the time people don't know that they are hurting someone else's feelings but they are, so I think it's made me more aware of things like that."

"It has made me listen a lot more and value other people's opinions."

"You use the skills from the training in everyday life now."

Primary Students

"A bit, for me it has. Like now it's easier for us to solve our own problems and we can even do the same procedure....."

"It made me stop and think before I tell my brother off for something."

"I'm not really sure. I haven't noticed anything but I suppose that's just my point of view. Other people might think that I've been treating people differently."

"Probably have more concern for a couple of people who you realise have problems; more respect for everyone else."

"It makes you think about others."

"I don't give a lot of suggestions. I let others come up with a decision."

"Yes because I know how to listen to people and what to do to show them that I'm listening."

"If I get into an argument I can use the skills to fix any of the problems up and I do the same things that I would if I was on duty."

"It makes you think before you act, like if you want to say something and then you think, "oh is that good to say?" and then, "no you don't say it."

**“What is the level of satisfaction of students using the mediation process?
What percentage have resulted in agreements?”**

Secondary Schools

The overall response of schools was positive but often for reasons other than reaching total agreement. Schools talk about the students in dispute having their side of the story listened to carefully, enough time taken to hear conflicts and not seeing students names continually re-appear on a troublemakers' list as signs of satisfaction. When de-briefing with students involved in the mediation, students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the mediation process.

In terms of students reaching agreements over issues, schools reported figures from as low as 60% reaching agreement through to 98% reaching agreements. The average for schools ranged around 90% or higher.

“That one’s a little bit hard to judge, some kids find that it’s been really useful and they’ve had ongoing support and ongoing contact with the mediators. With others I think they’ve gone through the process because they’ve basically been told, if you don’t do mediation it’s going to be a report to the coordinator, because that’s the next step in the sanctions code that we have here.”

“It’s been very good, a lot of positive feedback and one of the interesting things that I’ve found is, when I canvassed opportunities for a new group of mediators to be trained, that a lot of the students who came forward were actually students who had been through the mediation process as clients.....”

“And the reason it gets resolved is because they are so embarrassed that they are doing it in front of peers. Like when you verbalise with people your own age, I think they see how silly the situation is, whereas if it’s adults; kids tend to keep playing the game of, it’s his fault/no, it’s her fault, that sort of thing. But I don’t know if it’s personal satisfaction or relief that the issue has been resolved. I’d interpret it more like that.”

“I would say very high. It’s rare not to come to an agreement, but if they do, I would say that about 90% would be in agreement. It’s voluntary to come to mediation, so they are willing to look for a solution by even being mediated. But there are some kids who refuse to be mediated and they don’t come to agreement.”

“I think the most difficult sets have been the year 9 bitch group who will have mediation today between Suzie and Ann and tomorrow it’s between Ann and Jenny and the third day it’s between Jenny and Suzie so they are best friends today and worst enemies tomorrow and nothing can ever be resolved. And that’s the most wearying sort because they can make an agreement that is ok for today, but tomorrow it’s useless. But I don’t mind, it still gives them a taste of the process of how to deal with problems and they are getting role models by the listeners and by the mediators so I think it achieves a purpose even if it doesn’t achieve an agreement.”

“In terms of agreements, we get really high levels of agreements 95-98%.”

“There tends to be from my experience, and I’m not involved in all of the mediations that it was very positive, or, no, it didn’t do anything. It’s not, “Oh, I’m not sure yet”. They come out of the session knowing one way or another for them.”

“I think it is part of the school fabric and the kids respect it. I haven’t heard any gossip or nastiness or infringement of the rights of the people that are having their problem mediated, I haven’t heard any nastiness about the process. So that’s good.”

Primary Schools

There was a high level of satisfaction expressed about the program, particularly amongst the lower age students within the school. There were no serious reports back to teachers from students about concerns over the process or outcomes.

Students reaching agreement tended to range from 70% to 100%. The average ranged between 90% - 100% for primary schools.

“A survey at the end of last year showed that ninety eight percent of preps would prefer to go to mediation than have teacher involvement and this proved to be the majority consensus in all year levels.”

“Students who have used the sessions seem quite happy with them.”

“Most of the difficulties are resolved and I think most students are generally happy that they were able to voice their side of the story.”

“Students usually come away feeling calm, and there is not usually a re-occurrence of the problem.”

“Children who attend mediation sessions seem grateful that they have somewhere else to go instead of getting into trouble with the teacher.”

“I cannot recall any that have not been resolved with peer mediation.”

“Approximately ninety percent”

“Do you think the mediation helped the students?”

Secondary Students

“It did. I think they had a really good attitude towards it in knowing that they want to get their problems solved. And to have someone more their age that isn’t an adult, might make them feel a bit more comfortable and they’ll make steps to getting it over and done with a lot quicker.”

“Yes definitely, they came to an agreement.”

“I think it did. I remember the first one I did was about a kid being called names about his weight and stuff and it did help him. It was all sorted out and I see them in the yard. They are friends.”

“Very much, it has kept them out of trouble so far. It was a big fight and it hasn’t started again, so that’s pretty good.”

“Yes, most of the time it does. When we do our follow ups we generally find they are ok.”

“It gave them a new avenue to resolve conflict which they could feel confident in.”

“I think they learn the principles in life as to how to deal with problems and that was all about confronting them and trying to come up with solutions. So we have better ways of getting a solution to problems now.”

“They know that we’re students there to help them. We’re not there to muck around and everything we say and do is always in confidence.”

“In most cases they have benefited because they can hear the other person’s side of the story. Usually when someone is being called a bully, the teacher will say, Why are you bullying this person, you know it’s wrong” etc, but with mediation they can actually hear how they made the other person feel and they can understand it.”

“You look at it and it’s a process that we do but they actually feel better after they’ve been through it and they can come to solutions themselves.”

“I think they benefit from having neutral people close to their age.”

Primary Students

“I think it did because a lot of the kids would come in and they’d be crying because they weren’t friends and then they would go off hugging each other like they were best friends again.”

“The students think it’s better because they can’t get into trouble. Otherwise if they went to a teacher, they could get into trouble, so they choose mediation.”

“.....because no one has been doing it for the last couple of weeks, people have been coming up to the teachers and saying that they would like peer mediation to start running again because it was really helping them to solve their problems.”

“Yes because it gives them courage and helps them work things out.”

“Yes it has to because a lot of people have changed the way they behave towards the school and the way they behave towards other children.”

“Yes, it helped the students and they haven’t been in any more trouble I don’t think.”

“What are the ongoing plans you have put into place for peer mediation?”

Secondary Schools

Whilst there is a clear indication that schools want to continue with peer mediation, managing the program appears to be an on-going difficulty for schools. Of concern is the strong reliance upon one or two teachers within the school to coordinate the program and the consequences if they leave the school or move into a different teaching position. Most schools rely heavily upon their SWC to implement the program, with help from various coordinators.

Apart from one school reporting that they allocated two periods per week to organise peer mediation, this program is generally seen as part of the SWC role.

Schools, have however, attempted a number of innovative ways to continue the program.

“It is basically that we would like to run a peer mediation session once every two years so that we would have within the school, essentially trained kids at the end of year 9 so they would be trained as they go into year 10 and available as mediators. So that every two years we would redo it, which is a bit sad that kids in between would be missing out as potential mediators, but at least there would be that resource available.....”

“We trained five at year 11 and the rest were at year 10, so we’ve trained them across two levels thinking that’s a more efficient way of doing it....”

“It is written into our school charter as one of the priorities. So it will definitely continue.”

".....the trained students are helping co-facilitate the training of the teachers in both primary and secondary school. A better structure put in place for the school generally, to take ownership of the actual running on a day to day basis for mediation as part of the student management plan"

"Peer mediation is sort of part of the culture of the school now and I think every year it will be the four day training program with volunteers from either year 10 or mostly year 11. "

"As far as I'm concerned it will continue because it seems to work very well in particular instances....."

"The major task in 2000 is the initial retraining of student peer mediators, and staff and students within the college about the program."

Primary Schools

Primary schools were keen to continue peer mediation programs, however they were interested to get feedback and input from other staff around their thoughts in how successful they thought the program was. Although using outside trainers was a preference, a lack of funds meant that many schools will use their existing trained teachers to train future student groups.

"I am planning to keep it going. This year we trained my grades 4/5/6 children and volunteers then became mediators. The rule was that you also had to mediate children who were younger than yourself."

"A new group of grade 5 children were trained last Monday. These children will work with the grade 6 children for the last month or 6 weeks, and then they are able to take over next year."

"Evaluation will be done at the end, with regards to staff, how they feel. Are their children more resourceful about solving their own problems? Do they have more free-time and less minor incidents to deal with then on yard duty? Children will also be surveyed with regard to how they feel about the program."

"The staff who have undergone the training do not feel confident at this stage that they would be able to undertake the training of the new students without some outside support."

“We need to discuss the future with all the staff. The program will be evaluated each year and will depend on the staff response to the children.”

“Our aim was to always change the staff member each year to bring more people into the program and share the load evenly.”

“If funding is not made available again next year, myself and the other teacher will do the training with the new students ourselves.....”

“In your view, since the introduction of peer mediation has there been any changes within the culture of the school?”

Secondary Schools

Schools reported that the biggest cultural change has been around an acceptance by schools in understanding that conflict between students can be resolved in other ways; apart from teacher intervention. Peer mediation is now recognised as a legitimate option in resolving disputes. A number of schools have included peer mediation in their overall school discipline policy and the option of peer mediation now appears in the front of many school diaries as part of the range of options for dealing with conflict at the school.

“Peer mediation is one part of our positive peer relations program and it’s that anti-bullying/harassment total program that has had the biggest impact. Now administration has been extremely supportive of the total program of which mediation is part.”

“I think though, that it sends a signal to the school community not just students, but parents as well, that the school is trying to do something about harassment and also trying to teach some of our students some conflict resolution skills.”

“I know that mediation is recognised as an option in the school It is recognised by coordinators, administration and a lot of the students as an option and a reasonable option in the whole discipline structure of the staff.”

“.....there is an understanding amongst the wider school community that it is a caring school that will try its very hardest to help solve the issues that some kids have in their lives and I think that when mediation is suggested to a number of students it is not laughed at or thought of as being a silly way; it is taken quite seriously by the students.....”

“Peer mediation is accepted by the whole school community as worthwhile.”

“Through observations, there is now ownership by students of resolving conflict; less repeated incidents by offending parties who have been through the mediation process. A willingness to share and support by students within the school community. Development of a culture of talk amongst students. The mediation process has become accepted practice throughout all levels within the system.”

“Greater awareness of issues of harassment, increased confidence in mediators.”

Primary Schools

Schools reported a cultural change in that children are more confident that there are different ways to handle conflict and that there is now another major avenue for children to have minor disputes dealt with.

“The teachers understand what the program is here to achieve and are very supportive of the program. They are happy to refer children to the mediators and feel that it is very worthwhile.”

“There seem to be less punitive issues which the staff have to deal with.”

“They do not feel so alone and know there are children and adults out there who will listen to them. The program has been really well accepted and supported by the school.”

“I haven’t seen any dramatic changes, but the main advantage I have seen is the increase in communication skills in the actual mediators.”

“There has been a change in the culture which is able to be seen by the reduced number of children being sent to detention, the decrease in the number of children being sent to talk with the principal about their behaviour in the yard etc.”

“The fact that the kids have got some ownership of it, it’s taking pressure off the teachers who are on duty, which is wonderful…….”

“Not having been here for the whole year, even in the short period of time that I have been here, there appear to be less incidences.”

“Do you think that having peer mediation is worthwhile at this school?”

Secondary Students

“Yes, I think it’s a wise move. Instead of having the teachers worrying about detentions and time-outs, the other students get to learn rather than put up with the teacher yelling.”

“It helps the students to resolve their conflicts instead of them having to be punished and it keeps the peace a little bit. It also stops the students from disliking the teachers who punish them.”

“I think it is worthwhile in every school.”

“It is able to lessen the burden on teachers whilst giving students a leading role.”

“I think relationships between students seem more comfortable than relationships with student/teacher. Students can relate to other students more.”

“It gives the students a chance for free speech without the ears of a teacher but within the mediation guidelines.”

Primary Students

“It’s a better alternative than being sent to the office.”

“I think it’s worthwhile because I don’t think there’s been as many minor fights about, “Oh he won’t play with me”; and things like that since we didn’t have mediations.”

“There’s lots of people kicking balls away so it’s helped in that way.”

“Yes, because it helps other people look at problems. The teachers don’t always have to deal with it.”

“The teachers thought there was too much bullying in the yard and they brought mediation in and the bullying has been cut down a bit. And also because the teachers, when they dealt with problems, sometimes they used punishment, but with us, we just talk it over and I think the students like that better.”

“Yes because there’s stacks of people who were fighting; and a lot of children were embarrassed to go to the teachers about little things and so it’s good to have just kids that they can talk to.”

“What have been the difficulties in both introducing peer mediation and the continuity of peer mediation?”

Secondary Schools

The time needed to implement the program and financial issues were raised most often. Other issues of concern were finding a space to hold the mediation sessions and changing the way many teachers and coordinators dealt with conflicts (i.e., quick fix rather than referral to mediation). The major issue for the continuity of the program was the time required to, not only organise sessions, but time to publicise the program and to educate staff into using the program. Many schools were concerned over who would take the program on should the trained teacher(s) leave or change jobs.

“The difficulties have been that the coordinators are saying that sometimes it takes a lot of time to set up, find the mediators, choose the mediators, organise the time for them to do it, then you have to tell the kids that they need to go to mediation.”

“Reasonably easy to introduce, more difficult to continue. Some difficulties have been finding a place to run mediation, finding time for staff to assist with peer mediations, to set them up and get them going.”

“The referral process, having enough teachers who are competent enough and confident enough to set the mediation process going without me being there.”

“Establishing it as part of the accepted culture are the teachers and students themselves and issues of time, administration, issues of attitude, a sense that the teacher should be in total control, teacher should solve every problem at every instant.....”

“It’s empowered both the mediators and mediated disputants, it’s been a positive experience.”

“.....there was a few staff said, “What a waste of time, but you get that with anything. It doesn’t matter whether I said lunchtime’s going to be shorter and you can all go home at 2 o’clock, there’d be people who’d complain about that.”

Primary Schools

The time commitment towards the on-going program seemed the major concern for schools. A number of schools also expressed concern over suitable spaces to conduct mediation sessions.

“The program is hard work. Any new program takes time to convince people that it is actually worth doing. There may be an attitude that the program is not needed in this area, which is not true of course. This attitude is in relation to locality, the belief that we have got it all together, which is a false belief, no-one has it all together.”

“The only problem I see is time. We don’t seem to have enough time to debrief, meet etc.”

“The only difficulty we have at present is that we would like to find another venue to hold the mediation sessions. Where they are held now is too far away from where the children mainly play.”

“I feel we may not have done enough work with the rest of the school before introducing the program.”

APPENDIX

PEER MEDIATION QUESTIONNAIRES – APPENDIX 1

PERSON IN CHARGE OF AND RUNNING THE PROGRAM

How did the program first get thought about within this school?

Can you talk about the culture of the school before the program was introduced?

What sort of problems arose that made you think that mediation could be useful?

I want you to think about when you first thought about introducing peer mediation.

Who supported the idea?

Was there anyone else who supported it?

How did you introduce the idea to the rest of the school community?

When you thought about introducing peer mediation what resources were allocated?

(eg. time/money, outside trainer etc.)

What is your ongoing planning that you have put in place for the peer mediation program?

Who runs the mediation program?

How many people and their positions?

Describe the selection process for the mediators.

(year levels, how many, choices - ethnic, academic, athletic etc.)

Who was involved in the selection process?

Describe the training program that you ran.

(eg. length, who ran it etc.) (year levels participating and numbers?)

How is the program set up within the school?

(face charts/happy/sad, stickers)

How is the program publicised?

How long do you envisage that the mediators offer their services at this school?

(length of time)

Of trained student mediators did any chose not to continue?

Do you know why?

(moved school, lack of interest)

What de-briefing do mediators receive after mediation?

Do mediators receive ongoing training?

Does your school have any evaluation process in place for this program?

Copy of it, please!

Describe the referral process to your mediators.

From your understanding what do you believe the level of satisfaction to be from your trained mediators?

Are they getting enough work?

What is the level of satisfaction for students using the mediation process?

(high/low)

How is this evaluated?

Have the completed mediation sessions run within the school guidelines?

How many mediation sessions have been run?

(per year/term etc. – breakdown)

What percentage have resulted in agreements?

Are there written agreements, if so where are they stored and who has access to them?

Can you give me some examples of what has been referred to mediation?

In your view since the introduction of peer mediation has there been any changes within the culture of this school?

(administration, staff, students, parents)

What have been the difficulties in -

- A introducing peer mediation
- B continuity of peer mediation.

How many students attend this school?

(Campus where mediation is conducted?

Number of students on this campus?

What year levels are they?)

What is the gender mix, NESB etc?

Is the school Private, State, Catholic/private – Catholic/state? Etc.)

PEER MEDIATION QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENTS - SECONDARY

How did you come to do this program?

Eg. selected, application.

What was the training like?

Did the training make you feel confident about becoming a mediator?

How long did you have to wait to get your first mediation?

How did you feel when you did your first mediation?

- confident, unsure etc.

Do you think that mediation helped the students?

How well do students at this school know about mediation?

Has learning mediation skills made you treat people any differently?

Do you think that students who have been mediated benefit from the mediation?

Do you think having peer mediation is worthwhile at this school?

If so, how?

When you finish a mediation program, who do you de-brief with?

What support does the teacher (or teachers) offer you as a mediator?
(easy to talk to etc.) (ongoing training)

PEER MEDIATION QUESTIONNAIRE

PRINCIPAL - CO-ORDINATOR - VICE PRINCIPAL (OTHER)

How did the program first get thought about within this school?

Can you talk about the culture of the school before the program was introduced?

What sort of problems arose that made you think that mediation could be useful?

I want you to think about when you first thought about introducing peer mediation.

Who supported the idea?

Was there anyone else who supported it?

How did you introduce the idea to the rest of the school community?

When you thought about introducing peer mediation what resources were allocated?

(eg. time/money, outside trainer etc.)

What is the ongoing planning that you have put in place for the peer mediation?

Does your school have any evaluation process in place for this program?

(Copy of it, please!)

From your understanding what do you believe the level of satisfaction to be from your trained mediators?

What is the level of satisfaction for students using the mediation process?

(high/low)

How is this evaluated?

Have the completed mediation sessions run within the school guidelines?

In your view since the introduction of peer mediation has there been any changes within the culture of this school?

(administration, staff, students, parents)

What have been the difficulties in -

A introducing peer mediation

B continuity of peer mediation.

PEER MEDIATION QUESTIONNAIRE

STUDENTS – PRIMARY

How did you come to do this program?

Eg. Selected, application.

What was the training like?

(What was good about it?)

Did the training make you feel confident about becoming a mediator?

How long did you have to wait to get your first mediation?

How did you feel when you did your first mediation?

Confident/unsure?

Do you think that mediation helped the students?

How well do students at this school know about mediation?

Has learning mediation skills made you treat people any differently?

Do you think that students who have been mediated benefit from the mediation?

Do you think having peer mediation is worthwhile at this school?

If so, how?

When you finish a mediation session who do you talk to or discuss/de-brief with?

What support does the teacher/s offer you as a mediator?
(easy to talk to etc.) (ongoing training)

SECONDARY SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

BALLARAT SECONDARY COLLEGE

	Student Numbers	
State School	550 – Wendouree 400 – East Campus	Provincial/City

BAYSIDE COLLEGE

State School	350 – Williamstown 500 – Altona	City/Suburb	52% male
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BELMONT HIGH SCHOOL

State School	1050	Provincial/City	52% male
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CRAIGIEBURN SECONDARY COLLEGE

State School	700	City/Outer Suburb	50% male
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ERINBANK SECONDARY COLLEGE

State School	550	City/Suburb	55% male
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FLINDERS PEAKE SECONDARY COLLEGE

State School	254	Provincial/City	60% male
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GLADSTONE PARK SECONDARY COLLEGE

State School	1500	City/Outer Suburb	-
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MULLAUNA SECONDARY SCHOOL

State School	1400	City/Suburb	50% male
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MAROONDAH SECONDARY COLLEGE

State School	500	City/Suburb	50% male
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NEWCOMB SECONDARY SCHOOL

State School	830	Provincial/City	50% male
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SACRED HEART GIRLS SECONDARY COLLEGE

State Catholic	1350	Provincial/City	100% female
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ST. HELENA SECONDARY COLLEGE

State School	1300	City/Outer Suburb	-
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ST. PAUL'S COLLEGE

Private Catholic	700	City/Suburb	100% male
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SUNBURY SECONDARY COLLEGE

State School	1100	Country	57% male
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VERMONT SECONDARY COLLEGE

State School	1200	City/Outer Suburb	52% female
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PRIMARY SCHOOLS**Student Numbers****BALLAN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

State School	270	Country	60% male
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BEAUMARIS NORTH PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	470	City/Suburb	50% male
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BORONIA PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	400	City/Suburb	50% male
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CHRIST THE KING PRIMARY SCHOOL

Catholic	270	Provincial/City	50% male
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CROYDON HILLS PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	709	City/Outer Suburbs	55% male
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DEVONMEADOWS PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	267	Country	50% male
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FAWKNER PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	200	City/Suburb	50% male
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GARDENVALE PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	300 – Senior School	City/Suburb	50% male
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HEPBURN PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	60	Country	55% male
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MANDAMA PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	420	Provincial/City	60% male
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MINERS REST PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	110	Country	60% male
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MOOMBA PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	320	City	50% male
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MT. DANDENONG PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	230	City/Outer Suburb	-
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WARRANWOOD PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	640	City/outer Suburb	52% male
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WONTHAGGI PRIMARY SCHOOL

State School	-	Country	-
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