

YOUNG TALK TELEGRAPH

Inside this issue:

What's New at Young Talk?	2
Research in Scotland: The Curriculum for Excellence and Peer Mediation Research	2
Common Challenges and Potential Solutions for Peer Mediation	4
Peer Mediation in Scotland: Interview with Jill Lindsay at Auchinraith Primary	6
The Future of Peer Mediation	7
Former Peer Mediators' Voices	9

We want to hear from YOU!

Young Talk is a network for peer mediators in Scotland, and we need the input from young peer mediators to work! So we are very interested in hearing from YOU. Don't be shy to write to us, through email, or facebook, with any thoughts, ideas, concerns, or just to say hi! We would love to hear from you. The same goes for adults working with peer mediation. You can find our contact details at the end of the newsletter.



The young peer mediators at Rosshall Academy in Crookston, Glasgow

Welcome to the second issue of the Young Talk Telegraph!

Welcome to the second issue of our Young Talk Newsletter. We will be sending out quarterly issues with articles relating to peer mediation in general, as well as to Young Talk, the peer mediation network. We hope you'll enjoy reading this issue and finding out more about what's been happening around peer mediation in Scotland lately.



Peer Mediators in Scotland
Getting Together

What's new at Young Talk?

The past few months have been fairly quiet at Young Talk in terms of delivering training and events out in schools and communities. However we have been keeping busy at the office in Edinburgh, and we are excited for the buzz of winter with the school terms being in full swing. We are thrilled to be at the start of a partnership with Aberdeen City Council, and Dundee City Council, with the intention of implementing peer mediation sus-

tainably within schools in these councils. We are also very excited to be approaching our annual Scottish Mediation Network conference, titled Mediate 15. The second day of the conference (the 4th of December) will see a strong focus on peer mediation with separate stream of interesting workshops and events for young peer mediators that will be joining us from primary and secondary schools across Scotland. For more information, please get in touch.

"Local initiatives such as these where services come together to support peer mediation are very important

We recently joined a meeting up in Dundee between the Dundee University EDR (Early Dispute Resolution) Group (consisting of professional mediators) and

Baldragon Academy to discuss a collaboration between the two. This collaboration could manifest itself in regular meet-ups where the EDR group will help the young mediators at Baldragon develop in their mediation practice and offer guidance and support when it comes to conflict resolution. Local initiatives such as these where organisations/services come together to support peer mediation are very important in terms of the sustainability of peer mediation within schools. The EDR group also announced they would donate some (well-needed) ties to the new peer mediators at Baldragon Academy!

The Curriculum for Excellence and Peer Mediation: A piece of Scottish Research

Rachel Friel is an acting principal teacher at St Leonard's Primary in East Kilbride, and also the peer mediation champion at her school. Not only has she promoted and implemented peer mediation at St Leonard's, but last year, as part of her postgraduate programme, she undertook a research project looking into peer mediation and how it relates to Curriculum for Excellence. Rachel was interested in investigating how peer mediation may contribute to the acquisition

"The study compared data from before and after peer mediation was implemented"

of the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence for pupils (= successful learners, confident individu-

als, responsible citizens and effective contributors). To do so she looked at three schools in the West of Scotland that were implementing peer mediation services, and collected data from pupils, parents, support staff and teaching staff at these schools. The study compared data from before and after peer mediation was implemented in the schools and the project span over two school terms. The results of her study support the idea that peer mediation contributes to developing the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence. Let's look a bit closer at each capacity and what the study revealed...



SUCCESSFUL

LEARNER. In terms of becoming successful learners, the results from the study showed that the pupils who had undertaken peer me-



diation had learnt new skills (such as conflict resolution and communication skills), and that these new skills were transferable to other areas in their lives, suggesting that their learning was not just limited to one setting or type of situation. Interestingly, the study also showed that even those children who were not peer mediators themselves had learnt conflict resolution skills through the peer mediation practices at their schools.

RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN.

The peer mediators in the study showed an increased awareness of their surroundings and the issues that may arise for their peers. They also felt more able and inclined to help their fellow



pupils, and that ability brought about a sense of achievement for them. Similarly, the parents of the peer mediators noted changes in their children's abilities to make responsible choices e.g. engaging in open communication rather than fighting. Peer mediation equipped the children with the tools to make more responsible choices that promote their own and others wellbeing.

EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTOR.

The study also found that children across all three schools were enjoying the opportunity to address and sort out problematic situations without direct adult as-



sistance. They felt more able to make positive changes in their lives and the lives of their peers due to peer mediation. Interestingly it seemed that even the children who were not peer mediators were learning to sort out their own disputes and situations through the peer mediation examples. Thus peer mediation had a positive effect on the ability of the children in the study to apply problem-solving strategies to everyday situations.

CONFIDENT INDIVIDU-

AL. The study showed that the children in the study felt an increase in confidence after becoming peer mediators – many expressed an ability to communicate better which led to higher confidence, especially in



social situations. Peer mediation decreased levels of nervousness in the pupils, and increased their ability to engage with novel people and situations. Some children also spoke about developing other attributes as well, such as more self-awareness and a better understanding of self because of peer mediation, and thus an improved ability to manage themselves.

Additional to all the mentioned benefits the study also showed that across all three schools there was an increase in teaching time as a result of the implementation of peer mediation.

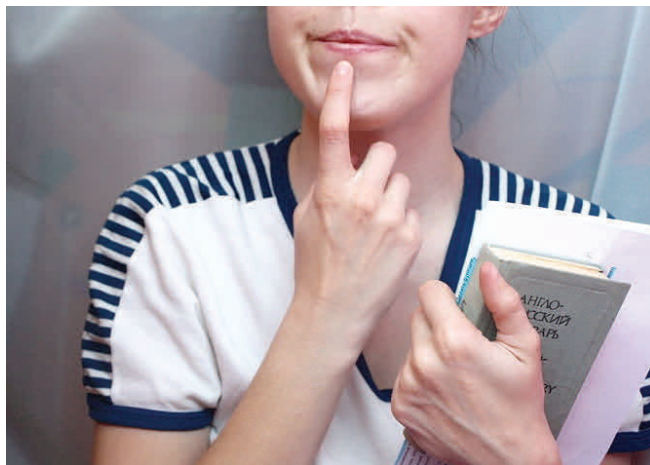
In summary both the quantitative data and the qualitative data from Rachel Friel's study shows that peer mediation contributes to acquisition of the four capabilities of the Curriculum for Excellence. These results are supported by other studies which suggest that peer mediation helps develop important life and social skills for children and young people.

Common Challenges and Potential Solutions

During the last year of Young Talk we have spoken to many young peer mediators out in schools about some of the challenges that they experience in their mediation practice. A common challenge for many peer mediation services seems to be that pupils in the school either don't use the peer mediation service at all, or try to use it for the wrong things. In these cases it may be that the pupils aren't actually aware of the peer mediation service in the first place or that they are aware of it but for some reason are not using it. Alternatively, they may be using it but for the wrong things (things that are not appropriate for peer mediation) or, as some peer mediators reported, other pupils are not taking the mediation sessions seriously, not being respectful, or even going to mediation and just making up things.

So partly what may be required in these situations is looking at how to get the right word out there about peer mediation in the school in the first place. There may be a need to re-inform pupils in the school about peer mediation to make sure everyone is aware of how it works, and has a good understanding of it. This can be done in various ways; through talking about it and doing a role-play with examples of different scenarios at assembly for example, or forming a publicity and promotion committee (within the peer mediation team) which is responsible for creating informational material

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for peer mediation, and talking about it in class etc. It may also be very useful in these situations to make sure that teachers and staff within the school are not only fully aware of peer mediations service but also supportive of it. In order for this to happen it may be needed to engage more with teachers/staff especially within guidance faculty and pupil support to make sure they are on board with peer mediation. Engaging with teachers and staff to inform them about peer mediation is the responsibility of the adult peer mediation champion (and can be supported by an external peer mediation trainer) at the school, but the young peer mediators themselves can play a useful role in demonstrating the use and benefits of peer mediation. It is also worthwhile to consider not just, administrative, teaching or support staff but also other staff such as janitorial staff who may be interacting with pupils on a day to day basis.

Furthermore, it may also be useful to make sure that parents are understanding and supportive of peer mediation as this may be a barrier to the success of peer mediation. Ways of informing parents of peer mediation may be through sending letters home with the children/young people explaining the process and benefits of peer mediation and also publishing material on the school website. It

can also be an option to invite parents to a special assembly (or parent's night/parent's council meeting) to shed light on what peer mediation is and why it is being used. So in summary it is important to look at the understanding and awareness that pupils, teachers/staff and parents have of peer mediation and how this may be affecting the service.

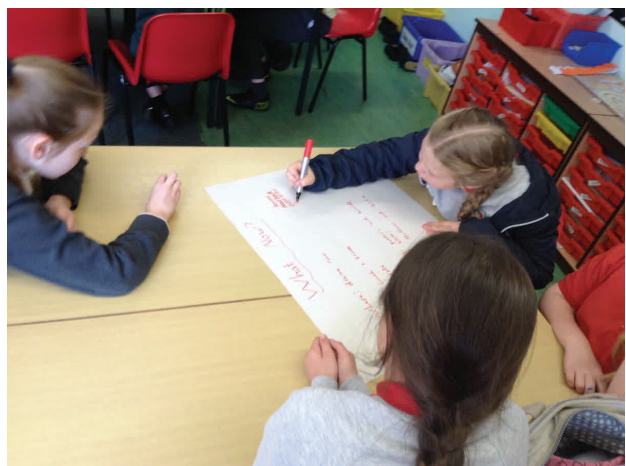
Another potential barrier may be how the peer mediation works practically – is the space comfortable and appropriate, is the time of mediation a good one etc. These things can also affect whether pupils use the peer mediation service or not. It can also be beneficial to look at the referral system for the peer mediation service and see if other ways of doing referring cases to mediation may work better. It may be that at a particular school it works better for the guidance department or teaching staff referring cases rather than self-referral, or the other way around. Or it may be that that the way of self-referring needs to be different, maybe more anonymous or more accessible.

Sometimes it takes a while for peer mediation to become established in the school, so it may also be the case that the first year is a bit of a trial year in figuring out what works and what doesn't work. Similarly it may also take some time for the pupils in the school to get to know the peer mediation team and trust the peer mediators and the process. Building a positive reputation for the peer mediation service is important for a successful programme, and can take a bit of time. One way of building trust and positive image is combining peer mediation with other conflict-resolution and anti-bullying services with the school that focus on building strong, positive relationships. This way the peer mediators can gain a positive reputation before mediation takes place. Moreover, it is also important to make sure that the peer mediators feel confi

"...it may take some time for the pupils in the school to get to know the peer mediation team and trust the peer mediators and the process"

dent and comfortable in their mediation practice as this may be another barrier to the peer mediation service being successful. Thus it is important to make sure that the peer mediators feel they have had adequate training and experience to take on conflict resolution within their school.

In terms of facing some of these issues it can also be useful to take a broader perspective, and think about some solutions that work on a grander scale. For example, the best way to ensure a successful peer mediation service at a secondary school is to have successful peer mediation services in the feeding primary schools. Therefore collaborations between primary and secondary schools in a learning community are very important. Similarly collaborations between one primary school and another or one secondary schools with another secondary school may also be very useful in sharing experiences, advice and best practice. It may also be very valuable for schools to have other local mediation or conflict resolution services supporting their school service, to offer both children and adults support and guidance.



Peer mediators in West Lothian figuring out how to run peer mediation service at their school

Peer Mediation in Scotland: An interview with Jill Lindsay

Jill Lindsay is the Depute Head Teacher at Auchinraith Primary out in South Lanarkshire, and one of the champions of peer mediation at the school. We are very impressed with Auchinraith Primary here at Young Talk; it is a great example of a school with a successful peer mediation programme which has helped change the culture of the school positively over the last few years.



How long have you had peer mediation at Auchinraith Primary?

In Auchinraith we are now into our 5th year of Peer Mediation

Why did you bring peer mediation into the school?

The school is set in an area where there are many challenges, both social and emotional. Many of the children come from homes where there is a high proportion of conflict either in the home or the community and the children see this being dealt with by violence and shouting. This sort of behaviour is learned and then transfers into the playground. In order to affect changes positive steps have to be made in educating the children and the parents/carers about peaceful conflict resolution. Studies show that children respond better to their peers aiding them with their difficulties, rather than adults and this seemed like a positive way for us to start to change the attitudes and behaviours of our families.

How has it affected the school and the pupils?

Auchinraith is a Rights Respecting School, in fact we were the first school in South Lanarkshire to receive the RRSA. We are very proud of our achievements, particularly since we do face many challenges. Peer Mediation plays a huge part in the confidence building of our children which has in turn raised the standards and expectations of our pupils.



Tell us a little bit more about peer mediation at Auchinraith (how does it work practically)?

Peer Mediation is carried out by our Primary 6 children. In order to maintain a high standard within our playground we organise a professional mediation trainer to come to the school. This is quite an expense for the school, however we feel that this is one of the reasons that Peer Mediation works so well in Auchinraith. The children apply for the position and then have an interview by the DHT and one of the trained Support Staff. At the selection stage we emphasise to the children that the position is one of responsibility and therefore it is vital that the children are fully committed to the post. This means that we expect those who take on the job to do so for the whole school session. We then have a 2 day training session for the Peer Mediators where they are trained just like any other candidate in the skills of Mediation. We then invite the parents to a special assembly where the children are awarded with their Yellow Caps (so they can be identified easily in the playground), their Peer Mediators badges and certificates.

The Peer Mediators are then organised into two groups...Week 1 and Week 2. This allows the children to Peer Mediate alternate weeks ensuring that they still have time to play with their friends in the play-

ground. The playground is divided up into 6 sections. There are 2 or 3 Peer Mediators allocated to each section. The children wear their yellow caps when they are mediating and if they have to Peer Mediate with any children there is a sheet which they fill out to record the situation and store in a folder. Some of the Support Staff who are trained help them with this in the playground. At our weekly assemblies we have an award for the Peer Mediator of that week. This includes a certificate to keep and a trophy for the week. We have regular meetings which are minuted and each Peer Mediator is given a copy to keep in their Peer Mediation folder. At the meetings the children discuss any issues they might have and anything playground related which might need to be announced at assemblies.

This year, as we are members of Young Talk we will be incorporating some correspondence into our meetings. In our entrance hall we have a board dedicated to our Peer Mediators showing photographs of all the children involved and information about Peer Mediation in Auchinraith.

What do you think is the best thing about peer mediation?

Our playground is a happy and safe place to be.

And what is the most challenging?

Making sure that all the paperwork is up to date and motivating those Peer Mediators who lack a bit of confidence and feel that they are "not good enough".

The Future of Mediation

By Sandra M. Untrojb

In my opinion the future of mediation is based on two pillars: teenagers and the use of new technologies.

First, if we talk about the very near future, 20 or 30 years, adolescents / young people today will be the users of the methods of alternative dispute resolution. They are the ones who in 20 or 30 years will have problems with their neighbours because of an annoying water drop from the air conditioning; they are the ones who will get married and get divorced; they are the ones who will constitute societies and will have differences with their suppliers, customers or partners; and they will also be those who will go on vacation and will have problems caused by delayed or missed flights or for losing their luggage.

And to solve all these conflicts, the teens / young people of today, adults of tomorrow will rely on technological elements that complement the daily life of every day of their lives. Therefore, I consider it very important that we, who are the ones dedicated to spreading the field of mediation, can approach these teens/young people through education in high schools and universities so that they internalize the use of mediation as the first form to solve a conflict. That is, when face with a dispute over any subject, do not think as a first

"First, if we talk about the very near future young people today will be the users of the methods of alternative dispute resolution. "

choice "I will sue the other party" but have as a first reaction the thought "I will go to mediation." To achieve this goal they should have all the knowledge necessary about mediation procedures, advantages not only in terms of costs but also those benefits arising from the possibility of improving personal relationships and communication with the other party of the dispute.

In conclusion, my proposal for the Future of Mediation is to focus on the dissemination of Mediation among adolescents / youth through education and develop as soon as we can new technologies applied to the resolution of conflicts, taking into account the progress that these technologies will have on the daily lives of people in the future.

Sandra M. Untrojb is a public accountant (U.B.A) and a mediator with the Mediation Center Professional Council of Economic Sciences of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires.

She welcomes any of your feedback and ideas: suntrojb@gmail.com

Former peer mediator's voices

We will hear from one former peer mediator in each issue of the Young Talk Telegraph.

Second up is William Kerr. William is now 22 years, and currently a Computing Support Officer at Napier University in Edinburgh. He graduated from Whitburn Academy, where he was a peer mediator, trained by the Scottish Mediation Network. Here's what William has to say about his experience:

Peer mediation.. well, it has made me a better person in my day to day life. I now have better listening skills which are invaluable in everyday situations. If you just listen a little more carefully you are able to fully analyse a situation and come up with a superb solution to anything. Peer mediation has given me

a greater insight into my life and shown me that what I do can have significant effect on others so, I guess you could say it has made me more aware of other people's feelings.

I use the skills I have learnt from peer mediation everyday as it makes my life a lot easier and allows me to communicate my ideas in a sensible manner. It also can solve a lot of the confrontation that can occur if you don't listen to people. The skills you can learn are fantastic and I was

"Peer mediation has given me a greater insight into my life"



grateful to have had the opportunity. I think if it wasn't for learning these skills I don't think I would have been able to be the person who I am today.

Peer mediation was also an advantage to me when I was a member of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYP) as being able to defuse tense situations is a useful technique. I am glad that I can pass these skills onto other people to help the world communicate in a more civilised way.

That's us at the end of the second issue folks! We hope you have enjoyed reading the articles and staying up to date with what's been going on! The next issue will be out in late winter/early spring. Again, we would absolutely love your feedback, or ideas for upcoming issues.

Roxan Nazifshirayi is the Young Talk Coordinator, and she's the one who has put together most of the material for this issue—so if there's anything you are wondering about, have comments on, or want to speak about (anything at all) just drop her a line. Her contact details can be found below.

A huge thanks to our peer mediators, and those working with them—you are all absolutely amazing, and your hard work is paying off.

Phone: 01315561221

E-mail: roxan@scottishmediation.org.uk
or: admin@scottishmediation.org.uk

The Scottish Mediation Network
18 York Place, EH1 3EP, Edinburgh



Peer Mediators in Scotland
Getting Together

Young Talk is part of..

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