

YOUNG TALK TELEGRAPH

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Young peer mediators during a workshop at Mediate 15, the Scottish Mediation Network annual conference

Welcome to the third issue of the Young Talk Telegraph!

Welcome to the third issue of our Young Talk Newsletter. We hope you'll enjoy reading this issue and finding out more about what's been happening around peer mediation in Scotland lately. Oh and as always, we would love to hear from you, whether you're a peer mediator or a teacher/adult working with peer mediators. So please don't be shy—get in touch! Our contact details are on the end of this newsletter.



Peer Mediators in Scotland
Getting Together

What's new at Young Talk?

We wrapped up last year in style with our annual Scottish Mediation Network conference (titled: Mediate 15) and had the pleasure and privilege of welcoming some of our Young Talk schools for the second day of the conference. Pupils from St Leonard's Primary (South Lanarkshire), Auchinraith Primary (South Lanarkshire), Mid-Calder Primary (West Lothian), James Young High (West Lothian) and Baldrigon Academy (Dundee) joined us at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh on the 4th of December.

The Young Talk delegates attended a separate stream of workshops during the day but also took part in some of the wider conference events. The first of the Young Talk workshops was led by the amazing magician Nick Patel (who once taught Dynamo some tricks)! Nick showed us how magic and mediation can go hand in hand and work together to help us understand mediation better, and become better mediators. Nick was very impressed with all of the young peer mediators at the conference, and is looking forward to joining us again at future events.

The second Young Talk workshop focused on the challenges and issues that peer mediation services may face in schools in Scotland – and what we can do about them. During the day Ms Rachel Friel from St Leonard's Primary also gave a talk on her research on peer mediation and how it ties in with the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland. All in all it was an incredibly fun and rewarding day, and we are so happy that we had some of our young mediators there. The professional mediators who attended the conference were all very impressed by the peer mediators, and very interested in peer mediation in general.

We have also been out delivering peer mediation training this year! In January we went to Baldrigon Academy (Dundee) to help the Young Talk peer mediators there deliver training to pupils from two nearby primaries; Craigowl and Downfield. It was two fun-filled days of learning with pupils from the different schools coming together to develop new and important skills! We also went to Webster's Academy in Kirremuir in early February for the same purposes and had an amazing time training the high school pupils there, as well as a few primary pupils.

NOTABLE NEW RESOURCES

There's been a document put together on how to best face challenges that come up in school, as a result of the workshop held at the conference. The document is titled 'Sustainability Tool – Common challenges and Potential Solutions' and is available on the webpage to all members under 'Member Resources'. You can also email me directly for this document – it is a useful tool in overcoming some common challenges and improving sustainability of your service.

Another new document is also available on the website – a guide for teachers and staff within schools to delivering the standard peer mediation training to pupils on their own. This document contains a rough guide to how to structure a two day training for new peer mediators, and specifies what games and activities tie into which mediation skills and stage. It's titled 'Guide to 2 day Peer Mediation Training Delivery'.

As a support document to this we've also written up the most common 'What If' questions that we get during training sessions, listing questions that young peer mediators have during the training related to how to handle different situations in mediation, and answers to these questions. This document is titled 'What if's in Peer Mediation'.



Our brilliant peer mediators from different schools after one of the workshops at Mediate 15

Back to the conference - the mediators from Mid Calder Primary in West Lothian made a wee blog post about their day at Mediate 15 – this is what they had to say:

"Six of our Magical Mediators were invited along to the Scottish Mediation Conference on Friday. It was a school trip with a difference, as we had to get two trains in order to get to Queen Margaret University, and our day started at 7:45am, some of us felt a little sleepy! We managed to fit in some numeracy work, as we had to calculate how much money we needed at the shop, and we used our prior learning to calculate the duration until our train arrived. We bumped into Carol Hope our Peer Mediation trainer at the platform at Waverly and we got the train to Musselburgh together.

First of all we listened to a keynote from Kenneth Kressel from the Psychology of Mediation. Some of it was a little bit difficult to understand but it allowed us to reflect on what time of mediator we are. It also was our first time in a huge lecture theatre (and university).

We then attended a workshop with Mediator Magician Nick Patel (who has worked with the famous Magician Dynamo). He reminded us of all the important skills and knowledge we need to be a mediator, while showing us some tricks. In the second workshop we discussed the challenges and solutions to peer mediation being sustainable in our schools, here we had the opportunity to share our magical mediators story and learn from other schools.

On the way home we reflected on the day, some of us thought it was 'The best day ever!'. Our next steps are to share this event with the other magical mediators and discuss as a group how we can develop the magical mediators service. A big thank you to Roxan and Carol for inviting us to this event, and to our parents for dropping us at the train station. Miss Burton said we demonstrated excellent communication skills and that we represented MCPS in a positive way."

Scottish Mediation Conference 2015



Sharing our story



Peer Mediation Around the World

Peer Mediation as we know it today developed as a result of general conflict resolution practices being implemented in the 1980's in schools around the U.S., and its use grew steadily throughout the 90's in the U.S. and Canada as well as in other parts of the world. According to research, about 25% of U.S. schools have had peer mediation services between grades 3-12. Today, it is something that is used all over the globe, however the U.S still has the highest concentration of peer mediation services and centres, and it is also where most of the research around peer mediation has been done. Since 2000 however Europe, Australia and South Asia have been advancing within use of peer mediation.

In Europe it was the Quaker influence that helped develop conflict resolution practices in schools, and in 1990 the Quaker movement helped form the European Network in Conflict Resolution in Education. Norway, Spain, Germany and Belgium all have substantial experience with rolling out peer mediation services in schools, and recently Eastern Europe has been increasing its use of peer mediation as well. In

“...about 25% of U.S. schools have had peer mediation services”

the U.K. peer mediation began developing in schools in the early 90's in primary schools with the help of community mediation services as well as services working with young offenders and in areas of political turbulence. Different conflict resolution practices are now widely used in schools around the U.K., and peer mediation has strong centres in various places around the country, especially in England where many peer mediation centres and training providers exist.

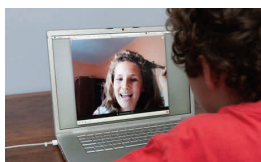


Leap was one of the first organisations to introduce peer mediation to the U.K. They are based in England.

In Scotland it is mainly Young Talk (through the Scottish Mediation Network) and SACRO (a community justice/mediation organisation) who provide peer mediation training and support. Education Scotland also provide peer mediation training to a certain extent, and there are independent mediators around Scotland who deliver peer mediation training as well.

Peer Mediation Online — a new avenue?

Online mediation is becoming more widely used within the professional mediation world. It allows for mediation to take place even when physical distance may be an issue, and also has certain advantages to face-to-face mediation. For example, it allows mediating parties to be within their own safe space where there may be discomfort or anxiety around being in close proximity to the other disputant.



In the U.S. the Online Peer Mediation Platform have been developing online means for peer mediation

They say there is a need for online peer mediation because:

- online public education is growing in the U.S. and elsewhere
- online communication is preferred by many, and is hugely widespread

Therefore the OPMP aim to show that peer mediation can be both taught and practiced online, and they are providing a number of resources and tools online for these purposes. There are some good example videos as well! You can find them here:

www.peermediationonline.org

Peer Mediation in Scotland: Why is it important?

- By Graham Boyack, Director of The Scottish Mediation Network

When I am asked why Scottish Mediation as an organisation is so keen on supporting and developing peer mediation in Scotland there are a whole number of reasons that come to mind. On one level I believe that anything that equips young people with conversation and listening skills are key building blocks in a core part of the education that should be available across Scotland.



Fundamentally the biggest attraction for me in peer mediation is that it equips young people with the skills to resolve their disputes - and this has positive impact on school culture and the lives of pupils attending schools in Scotland. At the same time there are also so many stories about children and young people who have enjoyed personal growth through the process of peer mediation that might not have happened otherwise. Any time I have seen young people from schools talking about their peer mediation experience this comes across strongly.

The best time to learn these skills is when you are young. Many people ask me about how children and young people are able to learn these valuable skills and my explanation is that, as all our trainers say, it is easier to teach these skills when people are young because, as you get older you have to unlearn unhelpful habits that you have developed over the years.

These skills are also central in supporting the Scottish Government's desire to narrow the attainment gap that exists between areas of wealth and poverty. The development of mediation skills and mediation-based approaches in work on homelessness, work with families and in restorative approaches in the justice system are in many ways reactive, whereas work to develop peer mediation provides an opportunity for a preventative and capacity building approach. Many times people say that if only they had been able to have a conversation about what was happening in their life that led to homelessness and family breakdown they think things would have been different. Whilst equipping people with these skills early on might not stop certain things from happening, it surely gives a better chance of having those important conversations earlier

"..there are also so many stories about children and young people who have enjoyed personal growth through the process of peer mediation"



Graham Boyack, our Director, believes that if children and young people are equipped with the tools to have difficult conversations early on in life way this would have a positive impact on their lives.

Mediation and Bullying Prevention

By Sabine Walsh, Independent Mediator (Ireland)

NOTE: If you as a peer mediator find out that bullying has occurred, or suspect it, you must always talk to a teacher about it. Peer mediation is oftentimes not appropriate where bullying has occurred, and it is very important that teachers are brought into the situation.

Recently there has been extensive debate around how to keep our children safe online and in school. As bullying has become more sophisticated, it ap-



pears to have been accepted that interventions targeted at such behaviour must now evolve beyond simple reprimand and sanction of the bully. I was asked to give a lecture on mediation in schools to some students of education recently and, as anticipated, the discussion soon turned to whether mediation has a role to play in addressing bullying. Fortunately I had done my homework and studied a number of school mediation programmes and the more recent literature on this topic. Of particular interest also were the perspectives of the teachers in the audience, all of whom were dealing with bullying-related matters on an on-going basis.

Most of the school mediation projects I looked at used peer mediation, whereby students mediate disputes between other students.(1) Usually all the pupils in the school, or all of those from one year, are given some training in conflict resolution after which pupils who are inter-

ested are invited to apply to go on to further training. Once trained, the peer mediators work in pairs, invariably with pupils younger than themselves. Because of the age of the mediators and the people they are working with, there are particular issues that have to be considered in the school setting, such as disclosure of abuse or incidents that are so serious that the involvement of an adult would be essential. Through peer mediation, conflict resolution becomes a learning opportunity as the children are empowered to resolve their disputes and become skilled in the recognition of which conflicts may require adult assistance. The mediators themselves learn from their training, and the subsequent application of the skills they have learned, and the pupils who are availing of the mediation often learn conflict resolution and communication skills in the process, often by observing with behaviour that the mediators are modelling.

"..using peer mediation, particularly in an environment where bullying exists is not without its difficulties..."

While many positive outcome studies from such programmes exist, even here in the Northwest of Ireland(2), using peer mediation, particularly in an environment where bullying exists is not without its difficulties and its critics.

Does this mean that mediation has no role to play in relation to bullying at all? Not at all. What appears to be particularly effective is when peer mediation forms part of a suite of approached and strategies

applied to conflict in schools usually described as “Restorative Practices”, which can be defined as “a set of behaviours and practices that seek to capitalise on the strengths in social networks and relationships and improve social discipline through inclusive learning and decision making. Essentially it seeks to involve those most affected by decisions as closely as possible in the decision making process, but in a structured framework that provides high support and high challenge/control.” (3) Such practices come in many forms, and include peer mediation, mentoring, buddying and peer support systems, circle time and talking circles, building communication skills and restorative conferencing, interventions akin to those used in crime and restorative justice projects.

“They (peer mediation programmes) can work therefore, by preventing bullying from arising and becoming commonplace in a school”

Such tools and skills address many of the root causes of bullying, such as low self-esteem, lack of emotional education and communications skills, and disempowerment. They improve the overall climate in the school and give children the skills to address conflict at any early stage, before it develops into a pattern. They can work therefore, by preventing bullying from arising and becoming commonplace in a school. Not only is this evidenced in the outcome studies, but one of the teachers whom I was lecturing, who works in a school which had put enormous effort into introducing restorative practices, was adamant about the positive impact it had on the school. She said bullying was a rarity in the school, and the reduction in anti-social behaviours such as vandalism was measurable.



All of us as mediators know how mediation can bring about fundamental changes in people’s sense of (positive) power, self–worth, and their relationships and communication with others. We also know that it is not a cure all, is not appropriate in every situation and often needs to be supplemented by other strategies. What we often forget however is how quickly young people learn and adapt, and how eager they are to use new skills. If only companies and workplaces, and indeed governments, embraced conflict management skills and mediation programmes as enthusiastically, the world might be a very different place...

1. See the Cool Schools programme in New Zealand for a particularly inspiration take on peer mediation. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=epqhgg1bt44
2. Mc Garrigle, M., Meade, K. and Santa-Maria Morales, A. Pilot implementation of Restorative Practices in Post-Primary Schools in the Northwest Region (2006) Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway (2006) available at www.transformingconflict.org
3. The Children Acts Advisory Board (abolished 2011).these contexts, and the fact that both bullying and domestic violence tend to occur over a period of time, and aren’t usually confined to a single incident.

Former peer mediator's voices

Hayley Gardiner was trained as a peer mediator in a London high school about 10 years ago. She is now 24 years and has graduated with an anthology degree from Edinburgh University and is working as a housing support worker for a charity in London. Here is what she has to say about peer mediation:

It is almost 10 years ago that I trained to be a peer mediator at a secondary school in South West London, but I have many fond memories.

I remember feeling empowered in being given the responsibility to resolve disputes without the input of teachers. Teachers were separate from our most of our daily realities and in my eyes had no idea about what we were going through. Being given this responsibility (or claiming it ourselves, we were trained by the older pupils, with very little input from teachers) meant that we took it very seriously. We wanted to prove our independence.

The training took place once a week after school. We looked up to the older pupils and enjoyed spending time with them in a school where year groups rarely mixed. We paid much more attention than in regular classes. In hindsight, these older pupils were good role models for us; engaged in the school community and excited to share their understanding of mediation and its benefits.

Once we had finished the training, the timetable was written up and the torch passed on along with the prized badges! One lunchtime a week myself and a friend were given the keys to a small room near the entrance to the school and held the weight of the schools social problems on our shoulders. We were ready. An outcome of our inhabiting that



room was that I believe we provided a safe space at lunchtime for individual pupils who were having a difficult time socialising. They could come whenever they wanted and were warmly welcomed. I imagine that opportunity was really valuable for those who were feeling lonely elsewhere.

Overall I see it as a wonderful initiative. It gave us confidence in our experience, knowledge and development. It was also formative part of my secondary education, gave me communication skills, and presented the school community as something we could contribute to. With hindsight I can also see elements which could be improved, and questions arise about how to ensure the system is used to its full potential. May the conversation continue!

"It gave us confidence in our experience, knowledge and development"

That's us at the end of the third issue folks! The next issue will be out in the start of the summer. Again, we would absolutely love your feedback, or ideas for upcoming issues.

Roxan Nazifshirayi is the Young Talk Coordinator—if there's anything you are wondering about, have comments on, or want to speak about 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.

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Peer Mediators in Scotland
Getting Together

Young Talk is part of..
scottish
mediation
network

Check us out at:

www.scottishmediation.org.uk/young-talk/