

**PEER MEDIATION METHOD
AS EXPERIENCED BY PUPILS**

An article on the results of peer mediation program surveys

Maija Gellin

2007

The Finnish Forum for Mediation
www.ssf-ffm.com

Introduction: Mediation is based on Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is based on the idea that the conflict is returned to the parties in such a way that they can themselves participate in solving the conflict. In criminal cases this means, as much as possible, including in the process all who have an interest to look after in the matter. When the group is formed, a neutral outside party will help the group to identify the caused harm as well as the needed measures to overcome the harm, so that as fair a solution as possible can be found. The goal of restorative justice is to repair the harm and lessen the trauma inflicted on the parties. The use of this method has decreased the risk of crime renewal, especially in violence cases, and increased the gratification felt by the parties. The tool for practising restorative justice is mediation.

Mediation is a voluntary method of conflict management in which an impartial outside party, the mediator, helps the parties of the argument, through a particular mediation process, to come to an agreement that satisfies the arguing parties. The mediator directs the process which outcome is that the parties themselves find a solution. Mediation is characterized by early intervention and often prevention of future crimes or conflicts. Its aim is to search for positive, sustainable solutions. An agreement is a highly positive social value. (The Finnish Forum for Mediation, 2006)

On the homepages of the Finnish Forum for Mediation are described the different mediation arenas represented and developed by the Forum. These arenas are: Mediation in criminal cases, mediation in family conflicts, family group mediation, school mediation, social and cross cultural mediation, mediation in work communities, commercial mediation, international peace mediation, court mediation and mediation by the Finnish Bar Association.

School Mediation

The British professor Helen Cowie (Naylor & Cowie 1999) has acted as a researcher in the so called Lorenzo project, in which 51 British schools took part. According to Cowie, 30 percent of children are being bullied during their school years. Often the victims keep silent about the bullying and the most usual symptoms are depression and other mental problems. A peer support system was started in the Lorenzo project schools and a year after, the pupils and teachers were asked whether it had helped. The victims felt that they had at last had the opportunity to talk about their problem and most of the people interviewed felt that the project had increased openness and improved the atmosphere in the schools. The problems could be shared and discussed. As a result of the project, the number of pupils keeping quiet about bullying was decreased by half. Ninety percent of the victims considered the project's activity very important, the teachers felt that school was safer than before and the parents appreciated it very much. Even the pupils who didn't experience bullying, felt that the peer support systems were useful. The project was carried out as a part of The Prince's Trust -project, in which 1835 pupils and 226 teachers from 51 British schools took part. The themes and results of the project have been reported in an article by Naylor and Cowie: The effectiveness of peer support systems in challenging school bullying (Naylor & Cowie 1999, 467- 479).

According to Cowie (Cowie & Hutson 2006) the power of peer support is that pupils themselves can creatively develop the methods they are taught and in which they actively participate. An important part in the new development has been the empowering of the pupils in participating in school's decision making thorough student associations etc. Cowie also gives the example of "checkpoints", where the pupils can discuss amongst their peers the safety and atmosphere of the school. The goal of peer support systems is to encourage the pupils to help themselves.

In her book *Just Schools; A Whole School Approach to Restorative Justice*, Belinda Hopkins (2006), who is the leading instructor at the centre *Transforming Conflict* in London, gives her view on what a restorative school is like. She claims that the ethics of justice and caring should be the basis of all activity in the school community. For the execution of these ethics, the schools need a philosophy, skills and processes based rather on restorative than criminal justice. Hopkins (2006,

28) states that school communities today face many challenges and that restorative thinking can support and get results in the following issues:

- making schools safer, happier places
- reducing exclusion and the need for exclusion
- creating a culture of inclusion and belonging
- raising morale and self-esteem
- raising attendance
- tackling bullying behaviours throughout the school community
- reducing staff turnover and burnout

Dag Hareide, the former head of the Nordic Forum for Mediation and Conflict Management (2005, 121-138) describes the Norwegian model for school mediation through the Conflict Pyramid below. The shape indicates that the most effort should be directed at the base of the pyramid, i.e. into positive cooperation and communication training. In learning these skills the pupils also learn conflict resolution, tolerance and communication with their peers and their teachers. The second step consists of actual conflict situations where the pupils themselves are a party and which they spontaneously strive to resolve either with the other disputant or together with other pupils during lessons or recesses. The third step consists of conscious mediation either by peer mediators or by teachers. The fourth step either replaces or completes the third by bringing in the traditionally used sanctions and punishments.

Sanction

Mediation by student or teacher

Conflict management when one is party to the conflict

Cooperation based on self-confidence, empathy and communication

Kaavio 1. The Conflict Pyramid according to Dag Hareide

Hareide (2005) sees mediation as a natural part of school communities, since conflicts occur in all communities. He thus claims that conflicts should be seen as challenging learning situations rather than as unwanted quarrel. The schools should and do act as a place of social growth and learning also where conflict management and mediation are concerned. It is a question of the goals set for the schools, other than the teaching of information, and of how the available resources are used and directed.

Peer Mediation

Definition

Peer mediation is a solution oriented method, which brings an alternative and voluntary method into the resolution of pupil's conflicts in the school's everyday life. The purpose of the method is to lessen the dysfunctions in the school by improving the pupils' communication skills. The idea is to create a solution oriented atmosphere where conflicts are seen as a part of every day life and their resolution more as a positive challenge than a difficult and unpleasant task.

Peer mediation follows a particular model and is an uncomplicated method, in which pupils are trained as mediators and then mediate the conflicts of slightly younger pupils. During the mediation, the parties get to tell their side of the conflict, describe their feelings and think about different solutions to the conflict. By following the model, the parties and the peer mediators reach the point of making an agreement, the keeping of which is secured by follow-up. (Gellin 2006a).

The European Model

When developing the Finnish model for peer mediation, it was decided that contrary to the American model, only some of the pupils in a school would be trained as mediators. In the US, usually all the school's pupils receive the training and a new mediator pair is chosen each week within a class. In many European countries and also in Finland, mediation is done by a group of mediators which size is relation to both the number of pupils and the number of cases mediated in the school. Mediators are working as a pairs so that two mediators are chosen for each assignment. This group is supported by a group of staff members who have received training in the conduction of mediation. *An important benefit of this model, is that grown-ups' support is optimal.* Organising meetings and trainings for the group responsible for mediation in the school – peer mediators and staff members – are efficient and easily arranged. The peer mediators get enough but not too many mediation assignments thorough which their mediation skills develop and improve. The peer mediators and the staff members involved become “welded” into an expert group that understands the importance and dignity of their work. Amstutz and Mullet (2005, 51), instructors of the American restorative approach, state in their book that children have the need to belong to different groups and feel accepted. It is especially important to feel that one's own opinions and thoughts matter. In our model for peer mediation, the support and follow up on behalf of the adults is an important part and problems such as ungovernable behaviour like reported in the US (see for ex. Amstutz and Mullet 2005, 71), do not occur.

Peer mediation in Finland has always the support of a group or a work pair of adults in the school. However, when peer mediation is started at a school, it is important to organise *training for the whole staff*. During the training, all the staff members get to discuss the school's atmosphere and the possible disturbances in it. It is also an occasion to discuss what cases are best suited for mediation and on what grounds cases will get referred to mediation. Even in the Norwegian anti-bullying program by Dan Olweus (see Amstutz and Mullet 2005, 71) the training of the whole staff is considered a prerequisite for forming a common understanding and a responsibility strategy in conflict situations. Even after the project's start-up, it is important to keep both staff members and pupils informed of the development of the project. Also parents are informed of the beginning of the project. The “mediation expert group” creates a strategy for what the peer mediators should do in case very serious or long term bullying comes up in the mediation cases.

Peer mediation does not bring an end to all problems, but it helps to solve smaller everyday incidents and to prevent the escalation of conflicts. Early intervention is an important part of peer mediation. On the basis of solution oriented thinking, pupils are trained to search for solutions and look into the future in stead of making accusations and looking to place the guilt. The goal is to give all the school's pupils a positive tool for intervening in situations that are seen as bullying or otherwise hurtful.

Researchers Jane Hill and Graham Wright (2006, 38) work in England at the University of Birmingham. At the Conference of European Forum for Restorative Justice in Barcelona in June 2006, they presented mediation as a healing process. Their view could be summarised by the following sentence: The right discursive approach produces a opportunity of social healing in the restorative process which method is mediation. In mediation, the right discursive approach means the right phraseology; questions and dialogue which are directed at the future in stead of looking to find the causes and placing the guilt. When the right discourse is used and no culprits are sought after, the parties are free to discuss their part in the matter and also their feelings. The opportunity for social healing is born when the feelings are discussed, when the parties state the effects of the incident and progress in the direction of the agreement while guided by the mediators. Committing to the agreement is a part of the amends that help the parties to return to the group of normal pupils – not to the groups of “bullies” and “victims”. Keeping the agreement is therefore a chance for the pupils who are the parties in a mediation, to change their self image. This image can then spread to how others perceive the pupil thorough the change in his/her behaviour.

Participation as basis for mediation

Sari Miettinen and Soile Väänänen (Laurinen (ed.) 2000) discuss the new childhood research in social science. According to them, the way of studying children has been adult- and institution oriented. When questions have risen they have been directed at others than children themselves. Children have either been considered only as parts of a family or objects of certain measures in schools and kindergartens. Children's own interpretations have not sufficiently been looked at, since children have not been sources of information for these studies. Miettinen and Väänänen make reference to studies by Alanen and Bardyn (1990) and Solberg (1990) and state that children are real and their biological immaturity a fact, but that how this immaturity is perceived is a cultural phenomenon. (Laurinen (ed.) 2000, 67-81).

Leena Kurki (2002) finds that the pedagogic programs, partially based on voluntary work, that support the civil society, create a true challenge for the schools' curricula. Philosophical, humanist and social substance should be integrated in schooling, because thorough them, values could be discussed more properly. Kurki describes the three important elements in P. Slattery's curriculum theory, which are also the main pillars of civil society. The first is cooperation in building a community, the second is the adopting of a process perspective and the third is the association of justice and caring in all the phases of the process. According to Kurki, voluntary work often meets these challenges because it offers the pupils and the teachers an opportunity for ethical growth. Voluntary work drives the pupil from the margin to the centre of the focus and gives him/her social meaning and a sense of personality as an important value in the community. (Kurki 2002, 121).

Anu Gretschel (2002, 190) states in her doctoral thesis that in projects where the young participate actively, they learn elements of civil action. Participating in one activity can be a start for civil action not only on a judicial, political or social level but also on a mental level. Participation can become a part of one's identity.

According to a book by Leevi Launonen and Lea Pulkkinen (2000) the Finnish school has concentrated on teaching and learning information even though schooling also has other goals. They state that approx. half of one's personality is explained thorough genes and half by the experiences gained in the growing environment. Some of these experiences are very personal and some are shared by other members of the close community such as a school. A good school can contribute more to the child's positive growth than the home alone. (Launonen & Pulkkinen 2000, 46 ja 49).

Children's and youngster's participation possibilities are ensured rather comprehensively by the Finnish Law. The basis for it has been stated in the Finnish Constitution and the Law for municipalities. It is the school's task to offer our youth such experiences that help them develop the skills needed in a democratic society. This view is included in the Finnish law for basic education as well as in the basis of the curriculum for basic education (Memo of a group improving welfare in schools 2005, 16).

The group improving welfare in Finnish schools came up with suggestions, directed at the following elements of school welfare:

1. Restored schoolday
2. Regulation on student associations and the hearing of pupils
3. Participating pupil – school community
4. Support of early prevention
5. Personal student counselling to all pupils in basic education
6. Prevention of bullying
7. Peer mediation
8. Compleitive training of teachers and their work communities
9. Cooperation between school and homes
10. Research of school welfare

(Memo of a group improving welfare in schools 2005, summary)

Leena Nousiainen and Ulla Piekkari (2005) describe participation as a right that can be learned. Youngsters do not learn participation by themselves because they do not possess the know-how, and so the conditions for it must be created. In order for the young to become active members of the civil society, the school must develop their communication and cooperation skills. Opportunities for communication between different groups and individuals are the basis for civil society. (Nousiainen & Piekkari 2005).

Results of the survey of spring 2005

The survey of spring 2005 was mailed to 33 schools which had received peer mediation training during 2001-2004. In all 21 schools reacted to the survey and material for analysis was received from 19 schools. The material was used to analyse not only the efficiency of the method but also to develop the peer mediation training so that peer mediation may even better meet the challenges of everyday situations in schools.

Mediated cases

In the 19 schools where the peer mediation method was used from spring 2001 to autumn 2004, all together 649 were mediated by peers. Out of these resulted 616 cases, this means 95%, in lasting agreement. 85% of the cases were physical or mental conflicts. The other cases (15%) were characterised as isolations, black mailings or property violations. (Gellin 2006b).

Characterisation	Cases	% of all cases
Physical	188	46
Verbal	156	39
Property violation	26	6
Isolation	20	5
Forcing	8	2
Other	8	2
In total	406	100%

Table 1. The characterisation of mediated cases. Characterised cases in total 406 (= 100%).

How the school's staff took it

The leaders of the peer mediators (teachers or other adults) were asked about the experiences they had. We got 55 descriptions from which 64% described the method as efficient. Mostly these staff members stated that "peer mediation works" or that peer mediation produces a more pleasant atmosphere in the school. 25% of the descriptions were negative, such as "the method is used too seldom" or "it is too difficult to use the method". Most of these were comments on the difficulties of organising peer mediation in practise and a few described the staff's negative attitude. In all, 64% of the comments were positive. 11% of the answers consisted of hopes and wishes such as to get more training or information. (Gellin 2006b)

Describing efficiency	Describing inefficiency	Describing wishes
- the method works 8	- not used enough 6	- more training 4
- positive effect on atmosphere 5	- the staff is not working efficiently for it 5	- more information 2
- makes working easier 5	- prejudices 1	
- info has been given out 4	- mistrust on the pupils' abilities 1	
- positive attitude 3	- no effect on the atmosph. 1	
- some use often 3		
- very satisfied 2		
- brings variation 1		
- easy 1		
- positive effect on pupils 1		
- pupils experience safety 1		
- the outside instructors good 1		
35/55 = 64%	14/55 = 25%	6/55 = 11%

Table 2. Descriptions of the method by teachers and other staff members. Number of all descriptions 55 (= 100%).

The Peer Mediators' descriptions

Answers from all in all 242 peer mediators were gained, which described the activity with all together 806 comments. These comments could also be divided into those describing the method's efficiency (74%) and those describing its non-efficiency (14%) as well as into wishes (12 (Gellin 2006b)

In describing the method's efficiency, the peer mediators often simply stated that "peer mediation works". In addition were used such descriptions as "the atmosphere has become better", "it is good that pupils can solve their conflicts without the teachers", "peer mediation is a good thing" or "there is now less quarrelling / fights / bullying". When describing the method's non efficiency, the pupils stated that the cases referred to mediation "are too easy" and that the other pupils don't know enough about the method or that the parties sometimes "don't take the mediation seriously". (Gellin 2006b)

Describing efficiency	Describing non efficiency
Works well 75	Cases too easy 14
Atmosphere has become better 52	Not everyone knows of it 13
The pupils can solve their conflicts themselves 39	Some don't take it seriously 13
Well organised 38	Takes the whole recess time 9
Disputes/bullying decreased 31	Some don't know how to act in mediation 9
Agreements can be reached 25	The mediation room is not good 8
Cooperation has increased 11	Sometimes it's difficult 5
Useful 11	Cases are only referred by teachers 2
Conflict resolution has been learned 9	Other 10
Parties meet and talk 9	
Hints are given even by pupils 6	
Not scary because no punishment 5	
Agreements hold 5	
The mediation room is good 4	
Other 10	
In total 330 descriptions = 80%	In total 83 kdescriptions = 20%

Table 3. Descriptions of the method by peer mediators. Number of all descriptions 413 (= 100%).

When describing the work of a peer mediator, the mediators often used expressions such as "mediation is nice / fun /good / cool". In addition to this, it was stated that the work "teaches you to solve conflicts" and the opportunity to help was also seen as a positive aspect. The mediation work was considered interesting, easy and an important way of making a difference. Some stated that

they were proud of the results of mediation. When describing the non efficiency of the work, they stated that it was "sometimes difficult" and described mediation duty by saying "it's boring" or "it doesn't work" or said that peer mediation was "not as fun as I thought" or "sometimes hard". (Gellin 2006b)

Describing efficiency		Describing non efficiency	
Nice/fun/good/cool	143	Sometimes hard	6
Teaches conflict resolution	24	Mediation duty doesn't work	6
Let's you help others	21	Not as fun as I thought	6
Interesting	17	Sometimes hard	3
Easy	13	Sometimes feels like you can't help	2
Let's you make a difference	12	Other	6
Good training	7		
Sensible	6		
Makes you feel good	5		
Responsible	4		
Teaches you social skills	3		
Group meetings good	3		
Other	10		
In total	268 descriptions = 90%	In total	29 descriptions = 10%

Table 4. Mediation work described by peer mediators. Number of descriptions 297 (= 100%).

The peer mediators' wishes were often that there would be more cases or that the teachers would use it more. More common meetings between the peer mediators and more training were wished for as well. A few comments stated that even small conflicts should be intervened and a wish to be able to use mediation skills even as a grown up, was expressed. It was even wished that all schools would start to use the peer mediation method. (Gellin 2006b)

Results of the survey of spring 2006

The Survey

The surveys were based on so called internal follow-up which goal was to follow the start-up of the new activity in the schools. The material provided by the survey is valuable and gives direct information on how the method is perceived and how it should be developed. The surveys have also given answers to the questions often asked by teachers and pupils during the trainings. The surveys have thus completed with information on Finnish schools some of the information gained thorough foreign research.

During the sprig of 2006, was carried out the third phase of the surveys where we wanted to look at the mediations as experienced by the parties of the dispute. This enabled us to add a third perspective into the two others: the views of the teachers and the views of the peer mediators and complete the analysis of the cases.

In part A of the survey, basic information was asked for. Part B consisted of 24 claims, which the parties commented by circling an opinion out of five options which were: 5 = agree completely 4 = almost agree, 3 = can't say, 2 = almost disagree, 1 = completely disagree. Part C consisted of three questions that the parties could answer freely by expressing their views on peer mediation.

Answers were received from two primary schools, one secondary school and two co-educational schools, all together from 105 pupils. 77% of these pupils were on grades 1.-6. and 19% on grades 7.-9. A few did not inform about their grade. Most were from grade 3 (17%) and grades 4 and 5 (both 15%) and grade 8 (14%). 65% of the pupils informed that they had been a party in mediation once or twice and only 5% informed that they had been a party more than six times.

Out of the 105 pupils, girls were 28% and boys 72%. This leads us to believe that more boys than girls had been a party in mediation. We don't believe, however, that a generalisation should be made based on this. As there are no great differences between how girls and boys have answered in the survey, they are considered belonging the same group.

How the main principles of mediation were respected

The five first claims of part B concerned the experiences of how the main principles of mediation were respected in the mediation situations. (The peer mediators have been trained to go thorough the main principles at beginning of each mediation situation. The principles are that mediation is: impartial, confidential, voluntary and solution oriented in stead of punishment oriented.)

92% of the pupils agreed either completely or almost with the claim that stated that peer mediation solves conflicts between pupils. 77% of the pupils experienced the mediators as completely or almost impartial, but 16% weren't sure how they felt about it. Only 4% disagreed with the claim "peer mediators are impartial".

85% of the pupils agreed completely or almost with the claim that stated that there are no punishments given in peer mediation, and 6% stated that they couldn't say if it was true, while 6% thought that there are punishments given. 85% felt that peer mediation indeed is confidential and only 3% felt that confidentiality was not respected.

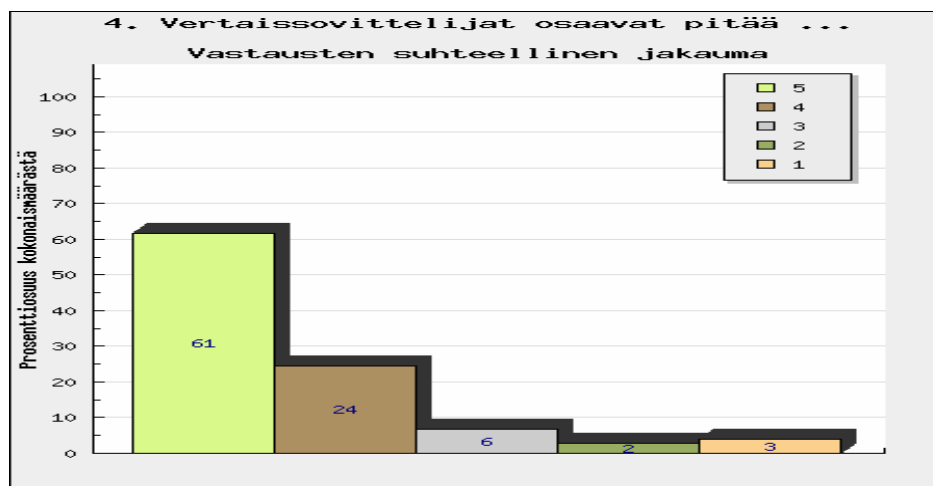


Table 5. The distribution in the claim 4: "Peer mediators maintain the bond on secrecy." 5 = agree completely, 4 = almost agree, 3 = can't say, 2 = almost disagree, 1 = disagree completely.

As a whole, it can be stated that the principles had been discussed in the mediation situations. The parties had been aware of the principles and all the claims were agreed with 85-95%. Leena Nousiainen and Ulla Piekkari (2005) state that youngsters don't learn participation by themselves and so the conditions for it must be created and the tools given. The fact that the main mediation principles were so well adopted shows that participation tools and methods can be assimilated. Cowie (Cowie & Hutson 2006) states that pupils not only adopt the methods, but that the true power of peer support is that the pupils can then creatively apply those tools.

Mapping out conflicts: Storytelling

Claims 5-10 concerned the discussion of the conflict in the mediation situation and we hoped they would give us information on how the parties had been able to give their sides of the story. 89% felt that they were able to talk about incident. 91% felt that they had had the chance to explain what they felt had happened in the conflict

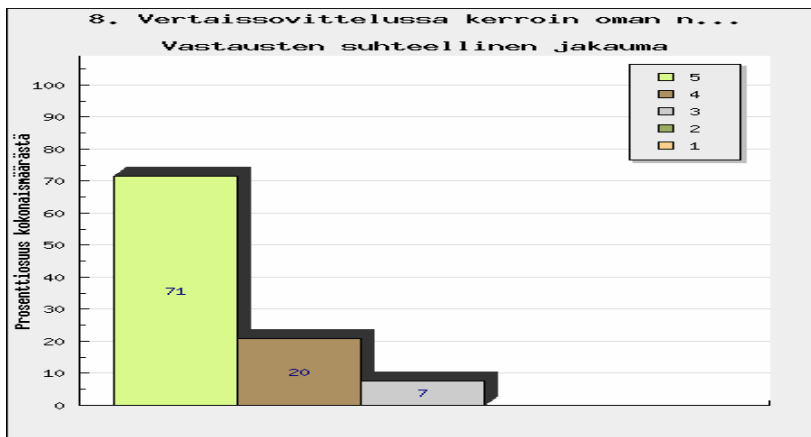


Table 6. Answers to claim 8: "I told my side of the conflict in the mediation situation." 5 = completely agree, 4 = almost agree, 3 = can't say, 2 = almost disagree, 1 = completely disagree.

Getting one's voice heard was a feeling often felt in the mediation situations as 81% agreed completely or almost with the claim "I was listened to in peer mediation". 10% couldn't say and 9% felt that they hadn't been heard.

Many Finnish surveys on bullying in schools have alarmingly shown that the bullied often don't talk about their experiences with grown-ups. The remarkable thing about peer support situations is that pupils finally have the feeling that they are heard. For example during the Lorenzo –project Naylor and Cowie (1999) stated that the number of pupils keeping quiet about bullying was decreased by half.

When assessing the claim on accusations and placing guilt, the answers were interestingly ambiguous. 32% felt that they were not accused of anything and 26% almost agreed 18% couldn't say, 7% almost disagreed and 14% completely disagreed.

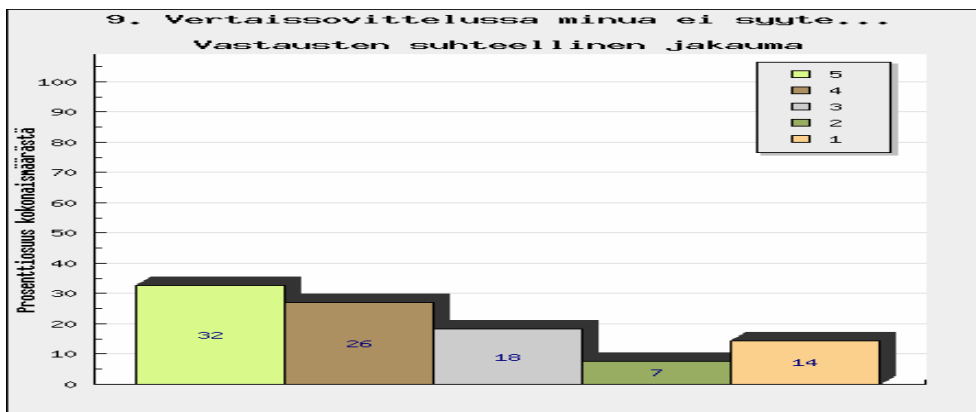


Table 7. Answers to claim 9: "I was not accused of anything in peer mediation." 5 = completely agree, 4 = almost agree, 3 = can't say, 2 = almost disagree, 1 = completely disagree.

Experiencing guilt is often discussed in the complementary training for peer mediators. The adults wonder about guilt too, but from another perspective. The pupils explain that even though the questions asked during the mediation are not accusations, the parties often feel guilty about their actions in the conflict situations and want to express this guilt, even apologise. This spontaneous feeling of guilt is always accepted in mediation and mediators are trained to encourage these expressions. The adults on the other hand often wondered whether the parties "get off too easily". However, the results that we got for claim 9 seem to corroborate with the idea that acknowledging one's part in a conflict brings forward emotions and this is neither easy nor pleasant. Discussion without accusations gives an opportunity to acknowledge one's guilt without losing face and com-

ing to an agreement allows for the social healing discussed also in research by Hill and Wright (2006).

Searching for solutions

The following four claims concerned the agreements. 72% felt that they were able to make suggestions on how the conflicts could be solved. 11% couldn't say and 14% disagreed with the claim either completely or almost. Claim 12 said that "peer mediators did not decide how the conflict was going to be solved". It was answered ambiguously: 42% agreed either almost or completely with the claim, 24% couldn't say and 32% disagreed with it either almost or completely.

The majority of the pupils, 82%, felt that also the other party was able to make suggestions on how the conflict was going to be solved. When asked about the writing of the agreement over half (53%) of the pupils felt that they were able to influence what got written, 18% couldn't say and 27% disagreed either completely or almost with claim 15.

It is important in mediation that the final solution to the conflict, the agreement comes from the parties themselves. According to the results of our survey this works quite well in peer mediation as 70-80% pupils say that the solution came from the parties. There were however quite many pupils how couldn't say if this was true. This might be because the solution came about by common discussion and not clearly suggested by one of the parties. Some of the disagreement with the claim could be explained by the pupils feeling that it was the other party who first suggested the solution. In some cases, the mediators may have strongly guided towards the solution and the parties felt that it did not come from themselves. Mediation is a learning process where mediators, as well as the parties, get a chance for ethical growth and learn communication skills. Antikainen, Rinne and Koski (2000) find it important to realise that both pupils and teachers come to the school with their personalities, bringing with them the behaviour they have learned from their close ones. Participation at school gives the opportunity for the school to be an arena for growth, where everyone can practise responsibility and making a difference. Pupils learn new skills at school and create their identity which they take with them to new communities when they finish school.

Agreement

84% of the pupils felt that an agreement was reached at the end of the mediation situation. 77% considered the agreement good or almost good. 10 % considered it bad, and 11 % couldn't say. When asked about keeping the agreement, 88% said they had kept the promises they had made and only 3% said that they had not been able to keep their promise. 85% also said that the promises were easy to keep, and only 4% felt they had been hard to keep.

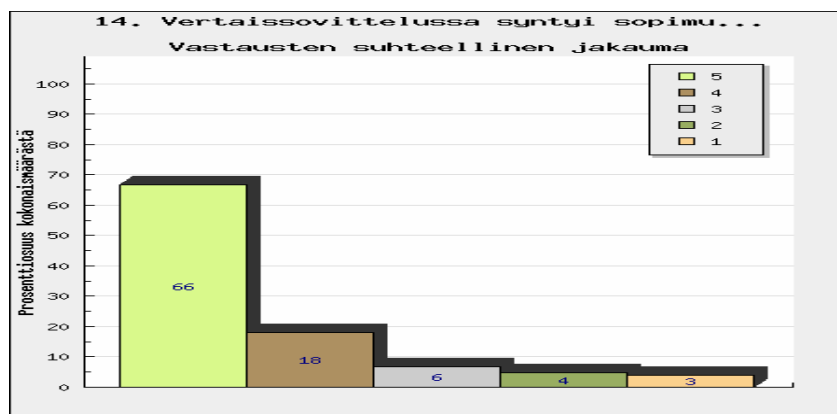


Table 8. Answers to claim 14: "We reached an agreement in peer mediation." 5 = completely agree, 4 = almost agree, 3 = can't say, 2 = almost disagree, 1 = completely disagree.

76% of the pupils felt that the other party had kept their promise either almost or completely. 11% couldn't say, and 6% felt that the other party hadn't kept their promise at all.

The results in this survey on how the agreements were kept, were in accordance with the results we had gotten from spring 2005 (Gellin 2006b). According to Ossi Eskelinens research on mediation in criminal cases (2005), it is keeping the agreement that gives under 15 year old offenders the experience of being able to erase the crime and get over it. Also Osmo Soininvaara, member of the Finnish Parliament (2001) has considered it important how the strong internal pressure eases when an agreement is reached and one does not become stigmatised as bad or helpless. According to Kurki (2002), voluntary work, like mediation, draws pupils away from stigmatised minorities and keeping agreements gives a person the feeling of being a capable member of the community.

Peer mediation as a method

The last four claims concerned the parties' opinions of peer mediation as a whole. 87% of them agreed either almost or completely with the claim "it is good that pupils can solve their own conflicts without the adults". Only 3% oli disagreed completely.

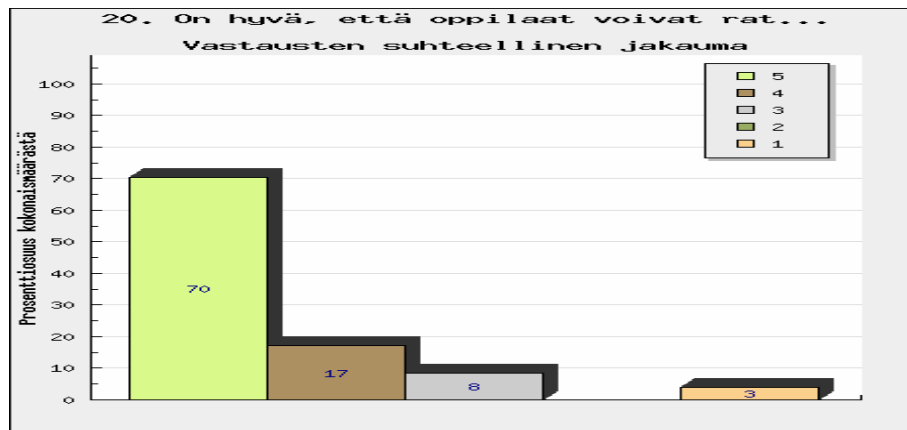


Table 9. Answers to claim 20: "It is good that pupils can solve their own conflicts without the adults." 5 = completely agree, 4 = almost agree, 3 = can't say, 2 = almost disagree, 1 = completely disagree.

79% felt that the mediators knew what they were doing, while 11% couldn't say. 68% felt secure or quite secure and 17% couldn't say. Only 4% disagreed completely with the claim on security.

As Launonen and Pulkkinen (2000) say, the Finnish Law on basic education states that schools should support pupils into becoming responsible citizens. Since 90% of our surveyed pupils felt that it is good that pupils can solve their conflicts without adults and 80% felt that it is good that there is peer mediation at their school, we can say that peer mediation is an important method of participation for the pupils. According to Launonen and Pulkkinen (2000) about half of one's personality develops in the close communities and the pupils' shared experiences are important factors.

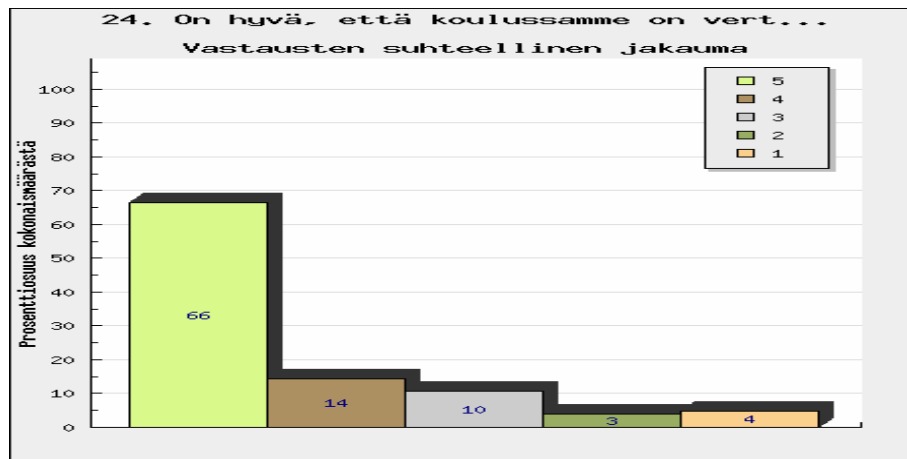


Table 10. Answers to claim 24: "It is good that there is peer mediation at our school." 5 = completely agree, 4 = almost agree, 3 = can't say, 2 = almost disagree, 1 = completely disagree.

Cases referred to mediation

In the first question of part C, the parties were asked what kind of incidents they thought should be referred to mediation. Most of the answers could be characterised according the following descriptions:

1. Verbal bullying	50
2. Physical bullying	54
3. Indifference and isolation	14
4. Forcing	11
5. Harm doing	14
6. Other	27
=====	
In total	170 descriptions

The results in this survey on the descriptions of the incidents, were in accordance with the results we had gotten from spring 2005 (Gellin 2006b) It also came up in the answers that the pupils hoped that more demanding cases would be referred to mediation. In Europe, mediation has spread to wider use in the schools. As positive experiences have accumulated and different methods have been tested, mediation has been used also in demanding cases and even in cases where either one party or both parties are teachers. This is marking the path towards the restorative school community suggested by Hopkins (2006). The Finnish schools that have used peer mediation for a longer time have also successfully tried mediation in various demanding situations.

Mediation as experienced

"First I was a little scared, but the end went well."

"It felt weird but pretty safe. I liked saying what the other had said."

"Pretty nice, it helped."

"It felt part good, part bad."

Direct quotes of the pupils' opinions

The second question in part C was on how it felt to be in the mediation situation. All together we received 99 opinions and comments as answers to it. Most of them, 45 comments, were positive and described the situation as nice, good, cool or easy. Other positive comments were feelings of security, successful agreement, or relaxed atmosphere.

24 of the comments can be characterised as neutral. According to them, the situation felt neutral, weird or odd. Many also said that they couldn't quite describe how it had felt. 21 of the comments described negative feelings, saying that the situation felt stupid, annoying or not so nice.

Ahola and Hirvihuhta (2000) have written about the important emotion processing that takes place in mediation. They state that instead of discussing the causes of the conflicts, it is important to discuss the emotions of both parties. The peer mediators are trained to help and encourage the parties to talk about their emotions. The pupils "speak their own language" together, where gestures and emphasises that often can only be understood by peers, play an important part. The interpretation of these gestures and sometimes even putting them into words is an important strength of the peer mediators. When emotions are heard and interpreted as real, a good basis for an agreement is formed and the parties' behaviour becomes more positive.

The parties' opinions of peer mediation as a method

"It's good that we can solve our arguments. I don't know what could be bad about it".

"It was good that pupils got to participate in it, but it was bad that sometimes the parties blew things out of proportion."

"It was good when arguments were solved. It was bad if they didn't reach an agreement."

"The arguments were solved. There were no bad sides."

Direct quotes of the parties' opinions

The last question of part C, was on what were the good and bad sides of peer mediation. As answers to this, we received all together 121 comments and opinions. 75 of them described the good sides. Most of these said that it was good that in peer mediation the arguments were solved. The pupils also appreciated the opportunity to participate, to tell their side of the story and to express their opinions freely. It was also seen as a positive side that the pupils were able solve their arguments without the adults and also without sanctions such as detentions or notices to parents.

In 11 comments, the pupils couldn't say what was good or bad about the mediation. 35 comments reflected on the negative sides, of which the most common was that sometimes an agreement couldn't be reached. As other negative comments, the pupils said that cases are referred to mediation too easily or that the other party didn't keep the agreement. Some few opinions described the questions asked in mediation as stupid or said that the mediators didn't know what they were doing or that talking about what had happened wasn't nice.

The opinions of pupils who have been the parties in mediation are very valuable and tell us if the method really works in the schools. Miettinen and Väänänen (Laurinen (ed.) 2000) consider it important in any research on children that the children themselves be used as sources for information. Processing the information we have gained from the children as parties and as mediators is an important work method in the peer mediation trainings.

Summary

Christina Salmivalli (1999) has stated in her research on school bullying that work against bullying needs to be sustainable and that bullying cannot be erased with campaign-like interventions but must be worked against continuously. Although she notes that most bullying does not reach the eyes and ears of adults, it is the responsibility of the community's adults to interfere with it. For example in many methods of preventing bullying, the adult plays the key role in making the decisions. It is the adult who discusses privately with each party of the disagreement, makes an agreement on changes in behaviour and also sees to it being carried out. In these methods the parties never meet and cannot discuss the conflict face to face. A common agreement is not reached but is made separately in accordance with the adult's wishes. However, research on peer support has shown that promises made to peers are better kept than promises made to others. What is also lacking in methods led only by adults, is the learning of communication and responsibility that takes place when the parties discuss the conflict together. The learning of empathy is possible only in genuine interaction and communication and the experiencing the other's feelings motivates a change in one's behaviour.

As an instructor of the school community, I find that pupils as part of the school community can be an important part in ameliorating the school's atmosphere by for example reducing bullying. As one

method cannot erase the whole problem, it is important that various participatory methods are used in ensuring peace at school. Alongside traditional sanction methods based on the use of power, should be used methods enhancing positive communication between pupils. This naturally as co-operation between pupils and school staff so that such common strategies can be created that allow for the sharing of responsibilities and give clear guidelines for actions in given situations. On the basis of this and other peer mediation surveys, it can be concluded that peer mediation works as one of these positive strategies, giving the pupils themselves the opportunity to ensure peace at school. In my work, I have become convinced of what Miettinen and Väänänen (Laurinen (ed.) 2000) wrote about research on children: "Children play an active part in child research. They have much influence on how their life shapes out and are much more capable in the process than previously has been thought." Miettinen and Väänänen continue that as childhood is understood as a social construction, science and childhood research must be seen as constructors of childhood. Information gained from children should be used in improving children's living conditions.

The results of these surveys show clearly, that there are conflicts in schools which pupils themselves can solve. During the years 2001-2004 649 cases were mediated in nineteen schools. In these schools, peer mediation has worked as a method of early intervention before other measures have been needed. (Gellin 2006b)

The results also show that the pupils have adopted the main principles of mediation and both the peer mediators and the parties have thus been able to work towards a solution and an agreement. The clear mediation model takes the situation forward and most often an agreement is reached which includes an understanding between the parties of not repeating the incident. The pupils are relieved by being able to talk about the incident. A reached agreement always makes the pupil's situation better, since the incident is not repeated. This regardless of whether the incident had happened many times before or not. As the learning process described by Antikainen, Rinne and Koski (2000), the same process can be said to take place in mediation. Individual experiences can empower people to act with the skills they have learned. Leena Kurki (2002) feels that by motivating pupils into participation, we teach them to use the resources that are the basis of a strong identity and civil action.

The experiences and attitudes of the school's staff have been mostly positive. Even though our results show that peer mediation is not used often enough, it is important that at least some of the school's adults have understood the value of mediation. In order for mediation to be used more in schools it would seem based on our results that more information of its benefits need to be gained.

In her doctoral thesis, Päivi Hamarus (2006), concentrated on the pupils' own experience of being bullied. Her material consisted of pupils' interviews. According to her research, bullying consists of momentary acts in interaction and can therefore not easily be detected by an outside party. For example the tone used in a greeting can make it bullying even though the teacher interprets it as kindness. Hamarus claims that the definition of bullying should be understood in a larger sense than before so that the too narrow of a definition wouldn't keep us from intervening.

According to our results, peer mediation has succeeded in intervening in momentary situations in such a way that the parties have gotten the opportunity to change their behaviour. In our peer mediation trainings, we use the term bullying in the widest sense to signify all incidents that are experienced as hurtful. The message we have gotten from the pupils is that early intervention is very important. Päivi Hamarus (2006) says the same thing in her research; guilt and shame go together with bullying. The pupils of a school community where there is bullying feel collective guilt for not intervening in the bullying. The bully may also feel guilt for his actions and the bullied feels shame for the things he has been bullied for. This is why it is such a relief for the pupils that bullying is intervened in. Apparently one of the strengths of mediation is due to the fact that pupils while solving the conflict "speak the same language". Tones, gestures and expressions are understood by both the peer mediators and the parties and can thus openly be discussed.

The results of the survey were encouraging, as both the mediators and the parties described their experiences in a positive way. The basis for developing peer mediation has been to enhance participation and democracy and we feel that in the light of our results, this is in fact what peer mediation is doing.

According to our surveys, the peer mediators considered it very positive to be able to participate in the ensuring of peace at school. As 806, 86%, of the comments by 242 peer mediators were positive or consisted of wishes for developing the method, we can safely say that peer mediation had become important to them. Thorough peer mediation, participation becomes a concrete and practical opportunity to make a difference in the pupil community. The results also led us to believe that the mere consciousness of the method being used at the school, made the pupils think more about their own behaviour in some of the schools.

One of the worries of both the adults involved in peer mediation and the peer mediators was about how the method could be used more in the school. As a solution was suggested more information and that also the pupils could take initiatives in referring cases for mediation. These measures have now already been developed and used at the schools using the peer mediation method.

One of the goals of the surveys was to gain information on how peer mediation in Finland could be developed. The results of the last survey (spring 2006) show us that it is important to inform all the pupils of the main principles in mediation. It seems they are well discussed in the mediation situation, but it would also be important to inform the whole pupil community of them. This would help the pupils to get the right picture about mediation and understand it as their right to a voluntary solving of conflicts. At the schools which have been using peer mediation for a longer time, the pupils have adopted the method so well, that they themselves have begun to ask for mediation in their conflict situations. As far as peer mediation training is concerned, what needs to be pointed even more out, is that the solution to the conflict should come from the parties themselves and it must be written in an agreement like the parties say. This means the right discursive approach on behalf of the mediator (see Hill and Wright, 2006), allowing the parties to discuss and produce the solution by themselves. When searching for the solution and making the final agreement, it is the sentences produced by one self that give the impression of a true agreement between the parties. A promise made with one's own words is that much harder to break.

As Kuula (1999, 69) discussed, I feel that our surveys show how participation enables change. Traditional sanctions are now challenged by the pupils' experience of capability and participation in conflict intervention. Our results show that mediation as a positive and future oriented method of conflict resolution is an efficient and pedagogic means of ensuring peace at school.

Tuukka Tomperi and Nelli Piattoeva (Kiilakoski, Tomperi & Vuorikoski (ed.) 2005, 272-273) emphasize that a democratic community is stronger and more capable of solving conflicts than a community with much disunion. Increasing the pupils' opportunities to participate does not necessarily have to happen with one stroke, but it requires listening to the pupils as worthy members of the school community. Certainly all adults can learn to listen to children's interests, worries and experiences. Even small actions can make a difference. The school communities which have been practising peer mediation for a longer time, have naturally already developed. The positive experiences have encouraged also the teachers to adopt a more mediative approach in their work. In some schools conflicts between pupils and teachers have for example already been mediated by a work pair consisting of one pupil and one teacher.

It is important that a child or a youngster can participate in the planning and realisation of what goes on in the community. When a child feels that he is being heard, he no longer remains a passive observer of life. He learns thorough positive interaction to weigh his own values and opinions and by the support of the surrounding adults he gets feedback on what is right and wrong. He is able to form an image of himself as a valuable and developing member of the community. Pupils feel safer in the school community when they know that there are ways of ending unpleasant situa-

tions that don't necessarily include punishments. The more adults; curriculum planners, researchers, journalists and policy-makers are interested in hearing children's views on life and behaviour, the more varied become the options for developing interaction for the common good and the greater becomes the trust in everyone's ability to make a difference in the community's atmosphere.

Maija Gellin
Special needs Youth worker,
Pedagogue in Civic Activities and Youth Work,
School Mediation Coordinator
Finnish Forum for Mediation
tel: +358 40 7079076, email: maija.gellin@ssf-ffm.com
hp: www.ssf-ffm.com

INDEX

- Ahola T. & Hirvihuhta H. 2000. Vääryydestä vastuuseen: Miten ohjata lapset ja nuoret ottamaan vastuu teoistaan? Helsinki: Opetushallitus.
- Amstutz L. S. & Mullet J.H. 2005. The little book of restorative discipline for schools: teaching responsibility, creating caring climates. PA, USA. Good Books.
- Antikainen A., Rinne R., Koski L. 2000. Kasvatussosiologia. Helsinki: WSOY.
- Cowie H. & Hutson N. 2006. The evolution of Peer Support in the UK. A manuscript written for the international Conference for Mediation and Conflict Management held in Helsinki 27-29.5.2006.
- Eskelinen O. 2005. Hermot vapautu ja tuli puhdas olo. Alle 15-vuotiaiden rikosten sovittelun käytännöt ja vaikutukset. Lapset rikosten sovittelussa –tutkimusprojektin raportti. Helsinki: Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön julkaisuja 3:2005.
- Gellin M. 2006a. Vertaissovittelu – sovittelumenetelmä kouluille. Koulun kansio. Helsinki: Suomen sovittelufoorumi ry.
- Gellin M. 2006b. Vertaissovittelumenetelmä vertaissovittelijoina ja osapuolina olleiden oppilaiden kokemana. Vertaissovittelutoiminnan seurantakyselyjen tulokset. Helsinki: Suomen sovittelufoorumi ry.
- Gretschel A. 2002. Kunta nuorten osallisuusympäristönä. Nuorten ryhmän ja kunnan vuorovaikutussuhteen tarkastelu kolmen liikuntarakentamisprojektin laadunarvioinnin keinoin. Jyväskylän yliopisto. Liikunta- ja terveystieteiden tiedekunta. Väitöskirja.
- Hamarus P. 2006. Koulukiusaaminen ilmiönä. Yläkoulun oppilaiden kokemuksia kiusaamisesta. Jyväskylän yliopisto. Kasvatustieteellinen tiedekunta. Väitöskirja.
- Hareide D. 2005. Konfliktmedling. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Hill J. ja Wright G. 2006. Reforming the criminal justice system through social healing. A summary published in the leaflet for: Restorative justice and beyond – an agenda for Europe: Fourth conference of the European Forum for Restorative Justice, Barcelona 15-17 June 2006.
- Hopkins B. 2006. Just schools. A Whole school approach to restorative justice. Second impression. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Kiilakoski T., Tomperi T. & Vuorikoski M. (toim.) 2005. Kenen kasvatusta? Kriittinen pedagogiikka ja toisinkasvatuksen mahdollisuus. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Kouluhyvinvointiryhmän muistio 2005. Opetusministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä 2005:27. Opetusministeriö: Koulutus- ja tiedepolitiikan osasto.
- Kurki L. 2002. Persoona ja yhteisö. Personalistinen sosiaalipedagogiikka. SoPhi 68, Jyväskylän yliopisto, Yhteiskuntatieteiden ja filosofian laitos.
- Kuula A. 1999. Toimintatutkimus. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Laurinen L. (toim.) 2000. Koti kasvattajana, elämä opettajana. Kasvatus- ja oppimiskulttuurit tutkimuskohteina. 2. Painos. Jyväskylä: Atena kustannus.
- Launonen L. & Pulkkinen L. (toim.) 2000. Koulu kasvuyhteisönä – kohti uutta toimintakulttuuria. Jyväskylä: PS-kustannus.
- Naylor P. & Cowie H. 1999, 467-479. The effectiveness of peer support systems in challenging school bullying: the perspectives and experiences of teachers and pupils. Artikkelit lehdessä Journal of Adolescence 22/1999.
- Nousiainen L. & Piekkari U. 2005. Osallistuva oppilas – yhteisöllinen koulu. Oppilaskunnan ohjaavan opettajan opas. Opetusministeriön julkaisuja 2005:19. Opetusministeriö: Koulutus- ja tiedepolitiikan osasto.
- Salmivalli C. 1999, 1673-1675. Kiusaamisen havaitseminen. Artikkelit lehdessä Suomen lääkärilehti 13/1999. Helsinki: Suomen lääkäriliitto.
- Suomen sovittelufoorumi ry. Viitattu 20.11.2006. <http://www.ssf-ffm.com>.
- Internet sites: www.minedu.fi, www.ssf-ffm.com, www.sovittelu.com, www.euforumrj.com