

Peer mediation in Finland – an overview

Background

Finnish Red Cross started to develop the peer mediation method in cooperation with "Hesan Nuorten Ääni - The voice of the Young in Helsinki" –campaign in autumn 2000. This campaign is organised by the Education Department of Helsinki City and the aim is to increase the participation opportunities and empowerment of pupils. The first trainings in schools took place at spring 2001 and within five years over hundred schools have started to use the method all over the country. The developing, trainings and evaluation of Finnish peer mediation have based mostly on the work of the voluntary professionals, freelancer instructors and the interest of the schools themselves.

At spring 2005 the committee for school welfare was appointed by the Ministry of Education. The aim of the committee was to prepare proposals for action to create conditions and structures for the support of the welfare and school satisfaction of children and young people. Another objective was to promote the opportunities of youngsters to contribute to the everyday life of the school. The final suggestions the committee found out important for school welfare were for example support of early prevention, peer conciliation and prevention of bullying. As a one result of the work of the committee got the team of the head instructors of the peer mediation method economical support from the Ministry of Education for the years 2006-2007.

The project of peer mediation

With the support of the Ministry of Education we could start the project of peer mediation lead by a national coordinator. The evident organisation for this project was Finnish Forum for Mediation. The work goes on mostly with the same people and team than before, but the new organisation gives now wider sceneries to the developing work. In the board of Forum there are representatives from every field of mediation in Finland. The economical support given to the project has mainly focused to lead new schools to start using peer mediation and find the new ways to increase the facility of the school staff for using the method. Also evaluating of the method and producing the good and updated material has been one important part of the work. After the first trainings we want to support the schools by offering updated information and special training sessions when needed. With the work of national coordinator this work is now possible.

The method of peer mediation

The method is developed to the use of pupils for the resolution of the conflicts between pupils. It is a structured process in which a pair of peer mediators in the role of neutral third party assists the voluntary participants to resolve their dispute. After having agreement there is a follow-up meeting, where the participants can acknowledge their success of keeping the solution. Peer mediators are usually one or two years older than the participants. There is always a team of teachers or other adults that facilitates the work of the peer mediators in school.

Peer mediation is used as a preventive method to solve the smaller conflicts before they turn to larger ones. The aim is to increase the skills of solving the conflicts in communication with the participants. The disputes mediated by peers are mostly physical cases, like smaller fights, brawls and pushing, or verbal cases, like use of bad language and bad names, shouting and telling lies or making fun of somebody. The method is also used in the cases of isolation, black mailing or forcing somebody to do something against ones will. Also the situations where somebody takes something without permission from the owner has been mediated by peers.

In Finland the method is used in primary and secondary schools. There is also some high schools trained and some vocational schools have been interested to start the method.

Trainings for peer mediation

The action of peer mediation starts in school with the trainings. It is very important to inform and train teachers and other adults in school to use the method. Peer mediation gives an alternative tool when handling the conflicts in everyday life of school. There must always be the support of the staff behind the method and to the peer mediators in school. It is also significant that teachers get the information how to choose the pupils to the training of peer mediators. With the expertise of the staff we can find a good group of voluntary pupils who are suitable and interested to work as mediators.

After having the staff trained there is the training to the selected group of pupils. Usually we train 20 pupils each school with the voluntary adults (3-8 persons). These adults will be the supportive team peer mediation needs for the practice of the method. The aim of the training is to learn the principles of mediation, the role of the mediator, strengthen the social and communication skills of the pupils and find the good practises to use the method in the school. The main method of the training is drama. The current project offers also further education and consultation to teachers and peer mediators as well as seminars and cooperative workshops in different parts of the country. The project takes care also for the education of the instructors of the peer mediation method.

The evaluation

From the very beginning of the peer mediation trainings we have been interested to evaluate the results. We need information, not only to get knowledge of the affects of the method, but also to develop the method even better. There have been four different surveys and studies of the method during the past seven years. We have found out the attitudes and experiences of the peer mediators, teachers and the supporting adults of mediators. The latest survey has focused on searching the experiences of the participants of the conflicts mediated by peers. The results can be found in the article included.

The results of the surveys have been encouraging. The method has been used successfully for the smaller conflicts as an early intervention, as we aimed. About 95% of disputes mediated by peers results in lasting agreements. Over 86% of the comments of the peer mediators have been positive. And 75% of the comments of teachers have told us in different ways that the method works, including also the wishes for further training. Almost 90% of the parties has told us that it is good that there is a method where pupils can solve their problems themselves in schools. And 88% of the parties told that they has kept the promises they have given in peer mediation. The main thing that needs to be improved is how to increase the use of this alternative tool, especially among the pupils who actually see much more the conflicts and disputes between their peers than the adults can see or notice. There has also been a lot of interest to extend the use of the method to conflicts between teachers and pupils. We have already started to point out these issues when teaching the peer mediators and their supportive adults and other teachers.

The future

The project of peer mediation has been fruitful during the past two years. We have prepared a proper material for trainings, information and consultation. Translations to Swedish are under work. We have successfully arranged over 300 basic trainings, further education and workshops in schools during these years. The response has been very good and more schools are interested to have the trainings. It seems now that the basic training has come into a good

and successful point. It is important now to do the follow-up work and offer the further education and consultation to schools which already have the method working or have had the basic trainings before but not the latest information. We have found out also that it is significant to have the practice of the method into schedule of school so that this tool becomes as a part of everyday routine in school. The video on our peer mediation method is prepared and gives a good way to give more information about peer mediation. Also our own homepage has successfully been used to get information in finnish, swedish and english.

The question of training more instructors to the peer mediation method is now also current. When there is more and more interest to have peer mediation method as a one part of conflict management in schools, also the ability of teachers to train the method should be increased. We have had first trainings to teacher in spring and autumn 2007. The aim is to build a net of trainers all over the country. We are collecting experiences from other countries and working on with this issue. Also the interesting question of expanding mediation used also in other conflicts in school communities is worth of further consideration.

Read more

[School meditation networking in Finland\(pdf\) >>](#)

[Peer meditation survey \(pdf\) >>](#)