

WIDENING THE CIRCLE

Exploring relational and restorative schools through a local, national and international lens

EA INAUGURAL RESTORATIVE PRACTICE CONFERENCE

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Belfast

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Finnish Forum for Mediation and Restorative Justice

www.sovittelu.com

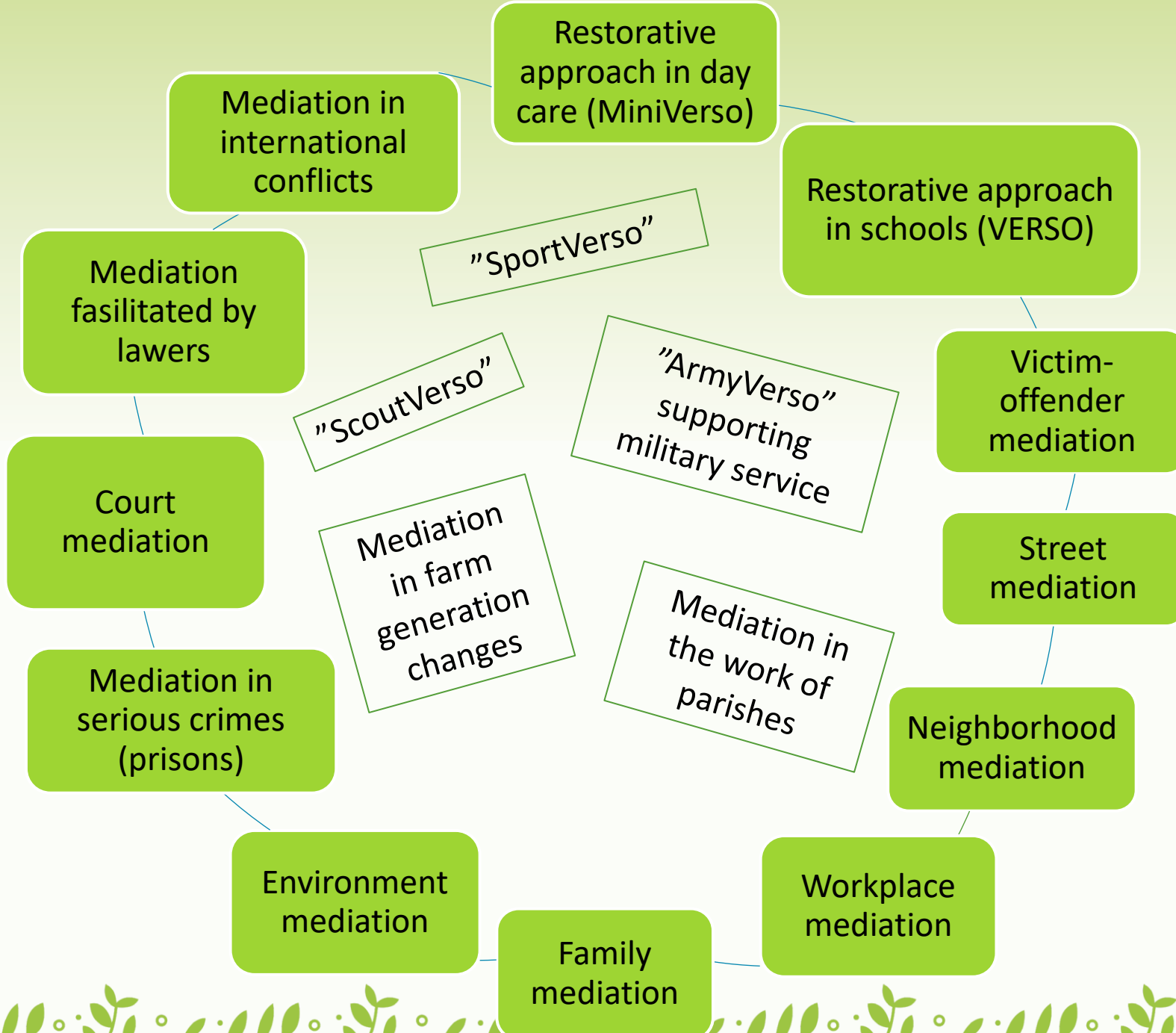
<https://sovittelu.com/vertaissovittelu/in-english/>

Widening the RJ circle from the perspective of Finnish experiences



“.. so, first mediation makes our school more peaceful, then our city more peaceful, and finally the whole country more peaceful! It starts like expanding all the time...”
(a peer mediator pupil)

VERSO
OHTELEMA



Access to mediation services in Finland

By implementing restorative approach and mediation in a school culture, schools are connecting to the conflict management tradition and development in Finnish society.



Access to participation for all members of a school community



MiniVerso in day care:

- * Day care staff as restorative encounterers and mediators
- * Staff and children to take advantage of mediation
- * Parents sharing their worries and notices

Verso in schools:

- * Students as peer mediators
- * Adults as advisors of Verso activities
- * Staff and students benefit from peer mediation
- * Parents sharing their worries and notices

Restorative approach and adult led mediation:

- * Day care staff and school educators to work as restorative encounterers and mediators
- * Parents in active co-operation and sharing their worries and notices

Mentoring:

- Day care staff and teachers to maintain and develop the restorative approach locally supported by the VERSO programme



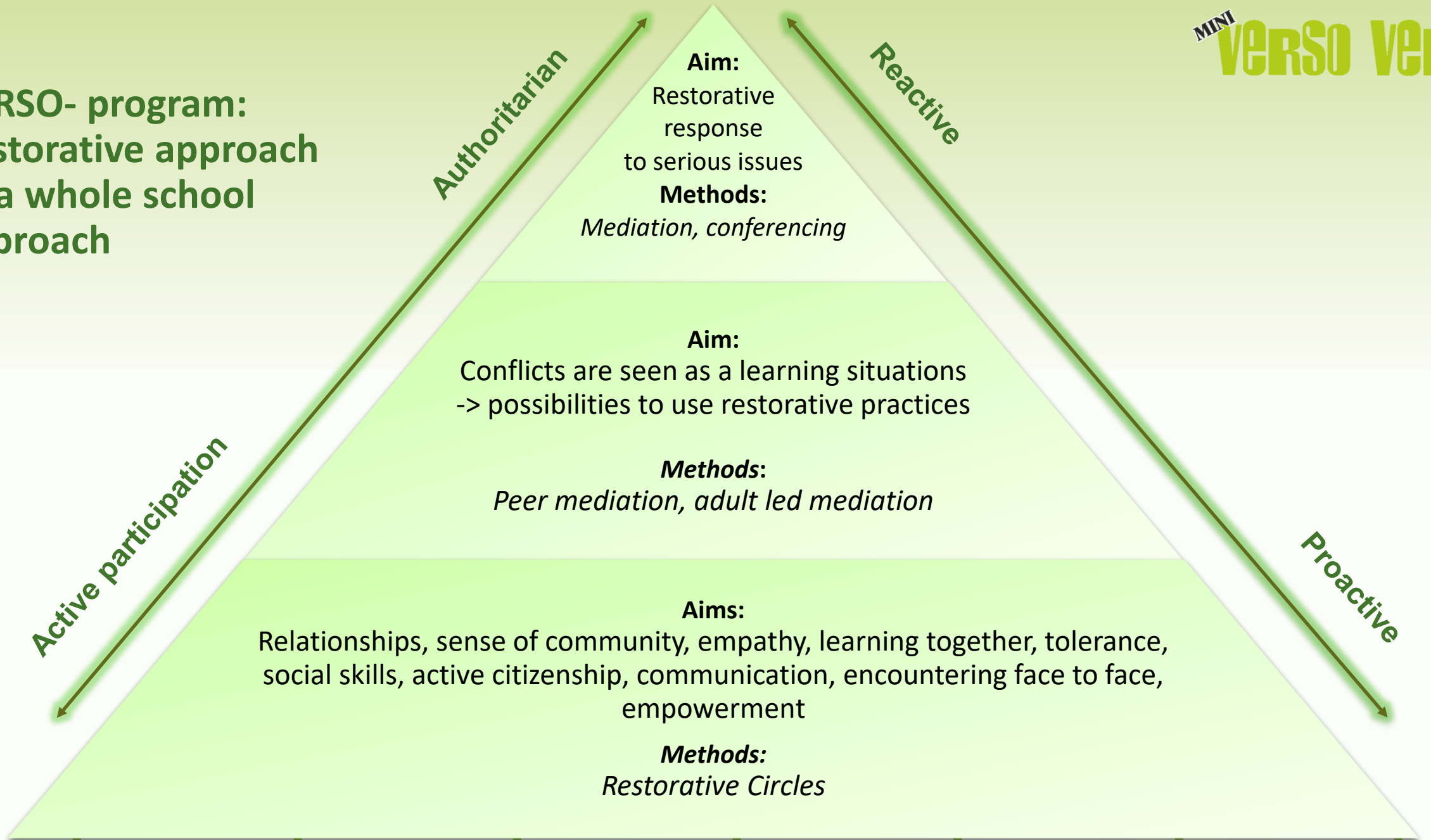
The short history of VERSO-program



- **The project was initially piloted in the youth work team of the Finnish Red Cross. The key method was peer mediation.**
 - The first peer mediation trainings in 2001 in Helsinki. Implemented by Finnish Red Cross youth workers, free trainings for schools. Spread especially in the area of three districts: Uusimaa and Helsinki, North Karelia and Kuusamo. The districts covered the trainers' fees and travel expenses
- **The good feedback from the field was brought to the attention of the Ministry of Education. Ministry offered funding for the development and expansion of the project. The aim was to offer the methods nationwide.**
- **The program was transferred to the Finnish Mediation Forum (NGO) with funding from the Ministry of Education in 2006.**
 - Funding from the Ministry of Education in 2006-2007 covered the salaries for two workers and the operational costs
- **After these years funding was applied for from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health's funding for NGO activities.**
 - From 2008 onwards, the project has been financed by this fund
 - Activities and methods of the program were developed to offer also other methods than peer mediation -> adult led restorative mediation, restorative circles and restorative school culture
- **Today, the annual grant is around 500,000 euros**
 - Covers the salaries of 9 team members and the operational costs
 - The schools that starts the program are paying a small deductible to cover travel costs -> this is so called "commitment fee"
 - Nowadays also many local projects fund schools that start the program

It has been essential to collect evaluation data from the field from the very beginning of the program to convince the financier as well as to develop the methods and trainings to meet the needs of the schools.

VERSO- program: Restorative approach as a whole school approach



Challenges and Answers

- **Critical attitudes of some staff members and parents**
 - Untrust to pupils active role and expertise
 - Demand to name the guilty ones and to use sanction-based measures
- **Lack of structures for restorative practise at daily work**
 - Time limits
 - Planning and training takes resources
 - Too much "projects" going on at the same time
- **Atmosphere of discussion in society**
 - Hate speech
 - Narrowed views of solutions, (f.ex. in media)
 - Polarization
 - "Not us, but the others" -thinking



- Ongoing sharing of information**
- Connecting implementation to the National Curriculum**
- Linking the restorative approach to the safety plans of a school**
- Clear support from the head**
- Clear instructions for staff, pupils, parents -> what to do in different situations (conflict management)**
- Possibilities for reflection together -> ongoing development**



**Children's rights
are emphasized!**



Series editors
Estelle Zinsstag &
Tinneke Van Camp

STUDIES IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice from a children's rights perspective

Annemieke Wolthuis and Tim Chapman (eds.)

elaven

**We can say NO to misbehaviour and criminal action,
but we never say NO to a child.**

“The right to be heard and to take part in decision-making are fundamental issues in increasing sense of community and avoiding the exclusion of young people.

Every child has a need to be respected as a unique person, and it is the responsibility of adults to ensure a safe growth environment for children.

The rights of the child cannot be realized without children being given the opportunity to exercise these rights. ”

(Gellin M. 2022)

The Step Model for mediation in schools and nearby society

1. Peer mediation in schools

Cases: bad name calling, pushing and kicking, smaller fights, isolation, threats and blackmail, bullying in cyberspace, hiding someone's property; these cases in early stage after assessment of mediation advisor

Mediated by trained peer mediators in schools

2. Adult led mediation in collaboration with parties, mediation advisors, parents and staff members of a school

Cases: cases not solved in peer mediation, repeating misbehaviour against the rules of a school, repeating social misbehaviour.

Mediated by trained staff members of a school

3. Adult led mediation in collaboration with the principal, parties and parents, and when needed police and social worker

Cases: serious breaking of school's rules, serious violence of other disturbing behaviour reported to the principal, pupil counsellors, members of staff or parents

Mediated by trained principals and/or other trained staff members

4. Quick intervention models in co-operation with local VOM-offices and police, social work and/or programmes like Ankkuri (Youthwork + police), Neighborhood Mediation or Street Mediation

Cases: assaults, property violence, thefts, serious misbehaviour, violence and threats especially among young

Mediated by VOM-mediators and/or trained youth workers

5. Mediation in civil and criminal cases in collaboration with VOM-offices, police and prosecutor

Cases against law: assaults, abuse and defamation, vandalism, violence, property violence, thefts, misbehaviour against law

Mediated by VOM-mediators



The restorative approach strengthens the learning of social skills



The skill of restorative encounter has freed teachers to support the student's ability to learn to interact, take responsibility and change their behavior.

Restorative thinking and support for restorative participation have strengthened the understanding of the value of each member of the community when increasing the well-being of the community.

Restorative mediation has decreased prejudices, increased understanding and responsibility, and brought respect between community members despite differing views.

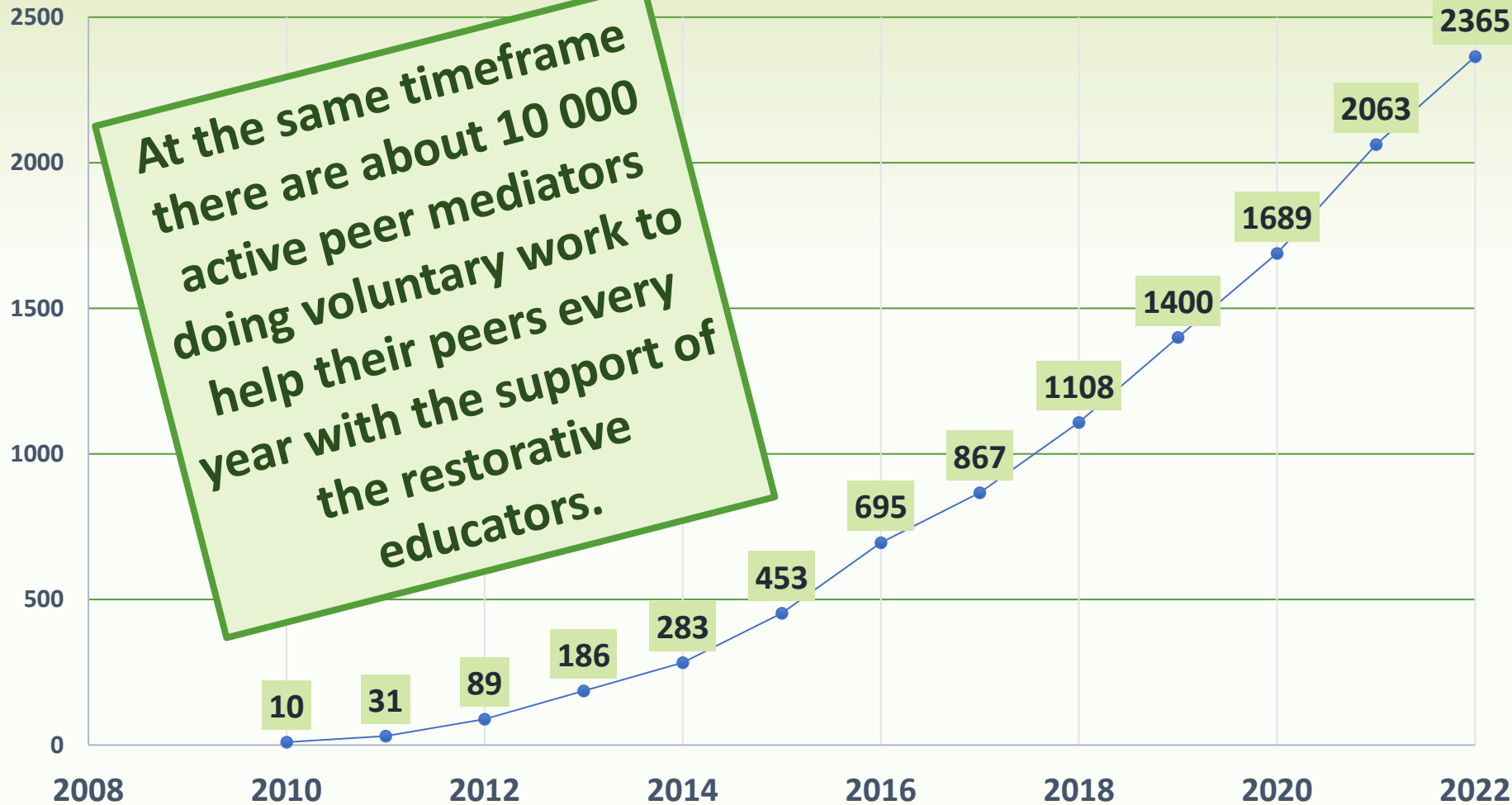
Gellin M. 2019. PhD dissertation:

<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952->

[337-173-6](http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-337-173-6)



The number of restorative educators increases every year



At the same timeframe there are about 10 000 active peer mediators doing voluntary work to help their peers every year with the support of the restorative educators.

"I also feel that the restorative approach has allowed me to get "closer" to the students, because I have experienced that the students dare to be more honest and open, because they feel that they are supported and understood."

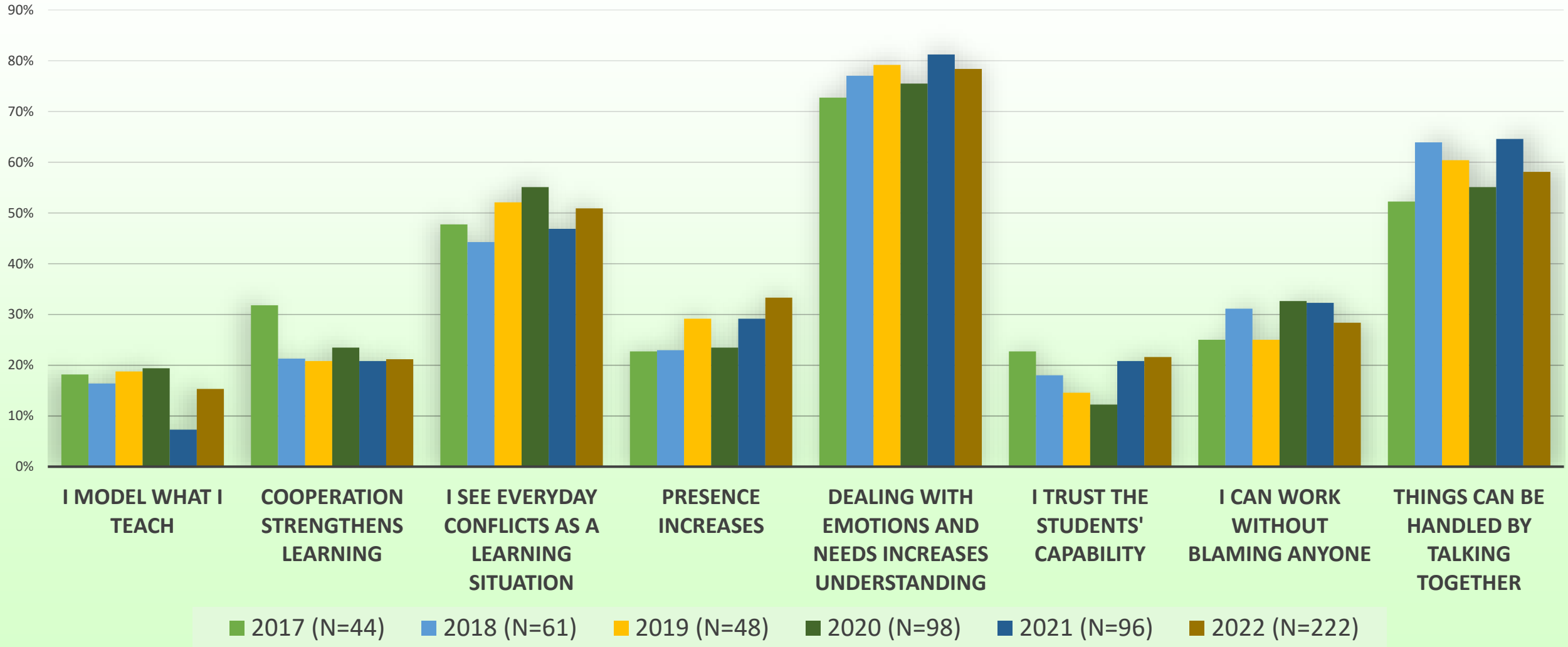
(a restorative educator 2022)



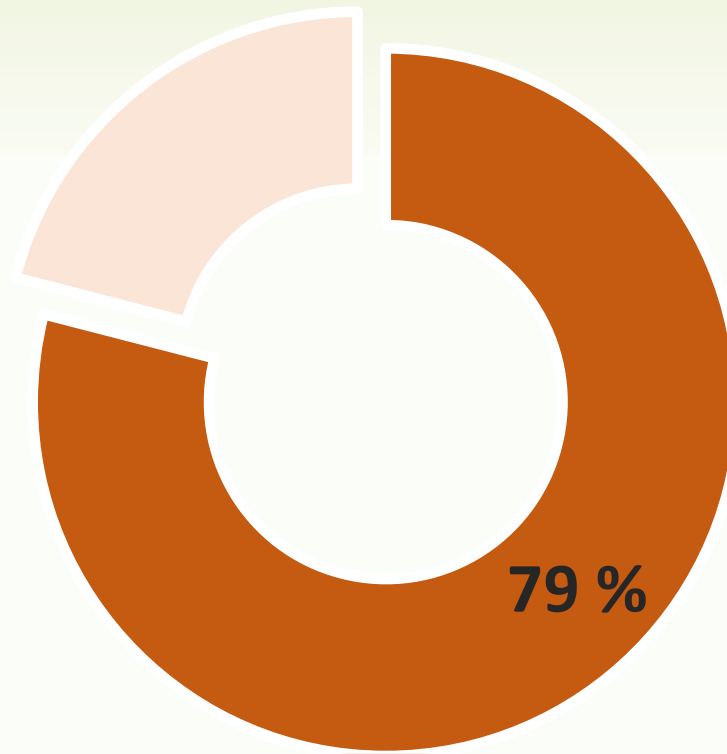
Restorative approach is important, because

(choose the 3 options most important to you)

(N = total 569 answerers)



Restorative practices supports respectful encounters

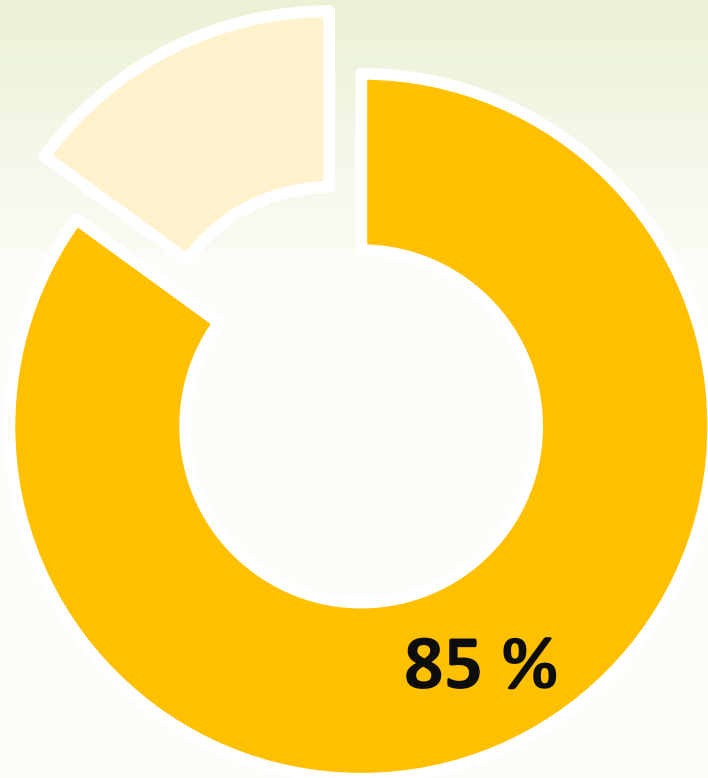


79% of restorative educators are reporting that restorative practices have strengthened students' experiences of being heard.

N = 569 restorative educators



Participation creates a good atmosphere



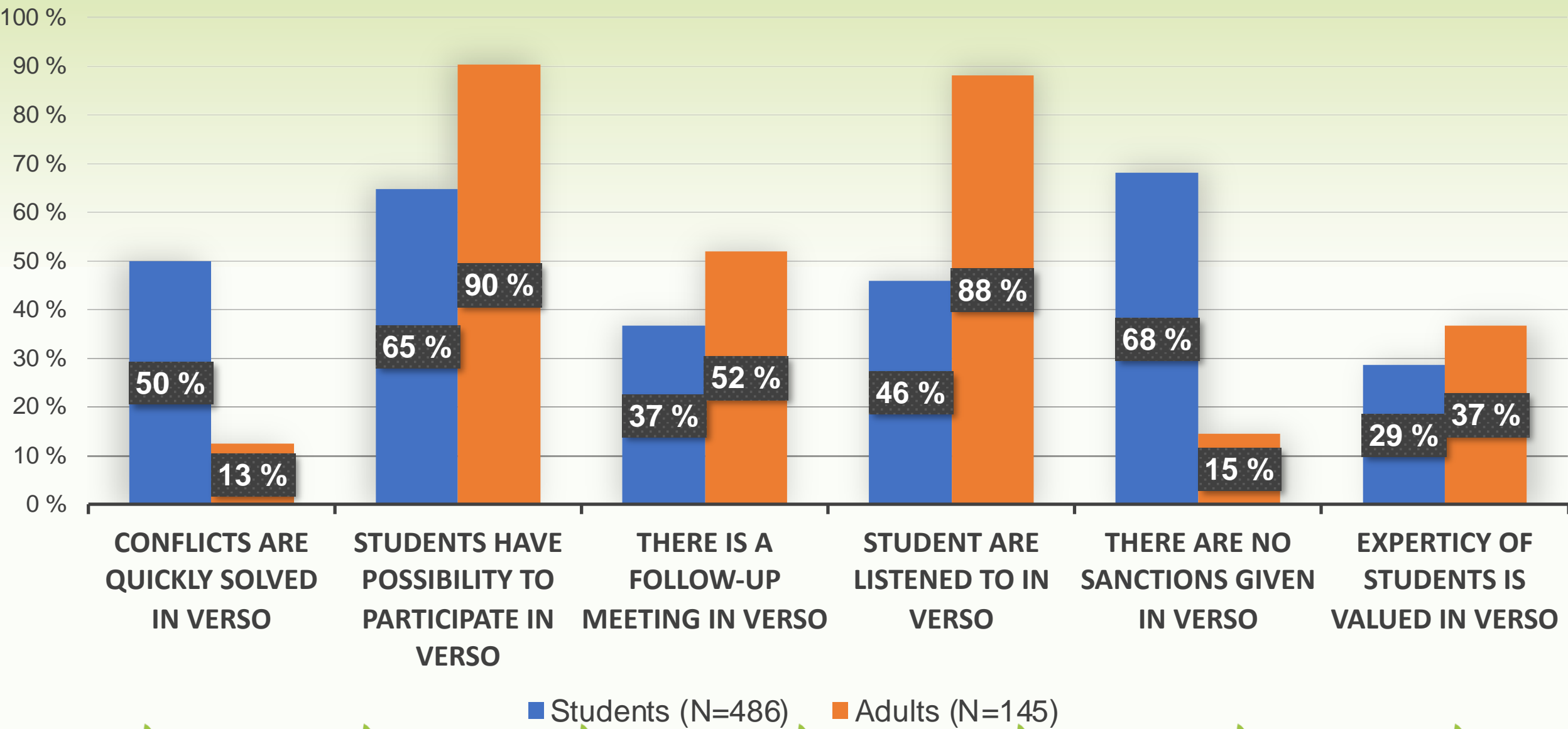
85% of the students and staff of the schools participating in the Verso program say that the use of mediation improves the school atmosphere a lot.

N = 486 students and 145 adults

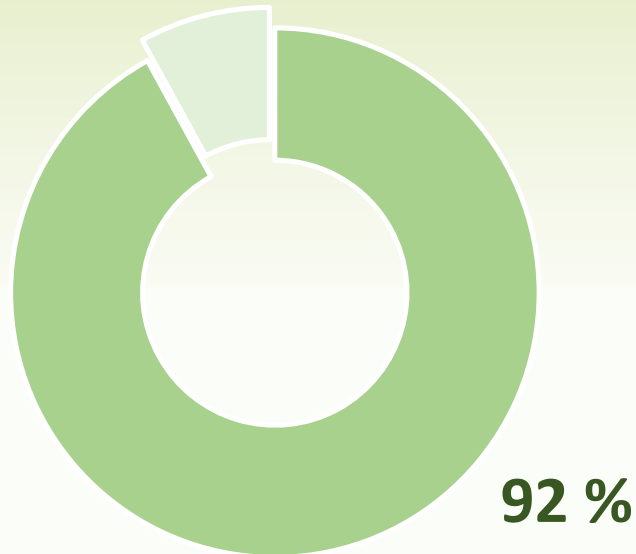


Verso peer mediation in important because

(choose the three options most important to you)



The change of behavior matters



According to the students' experiences, more than 90% of mediated situations lead to a positive change in behavior.

**“SORRY DOES NOT
EQUAL TRUST.**

**SORRY EQUALS
FORGIVENESS.**

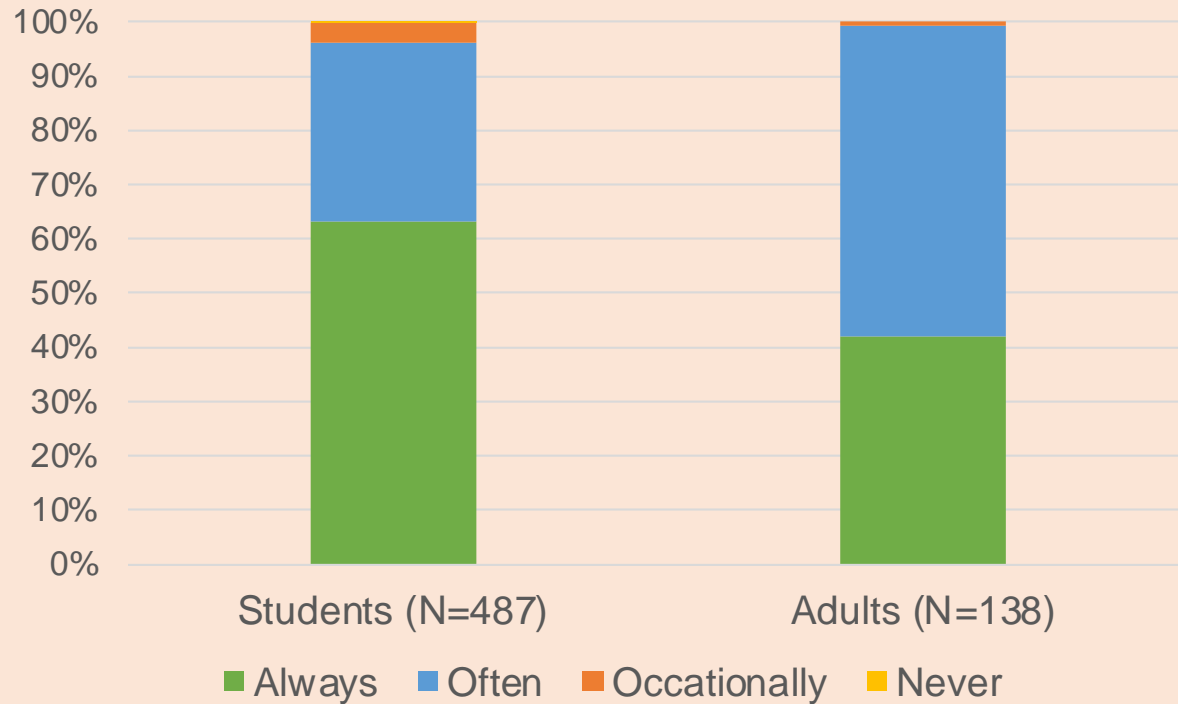
**CHANGED BEHAVIOUR
EQUALS TRUST.”**

- Dr Henry Cloud

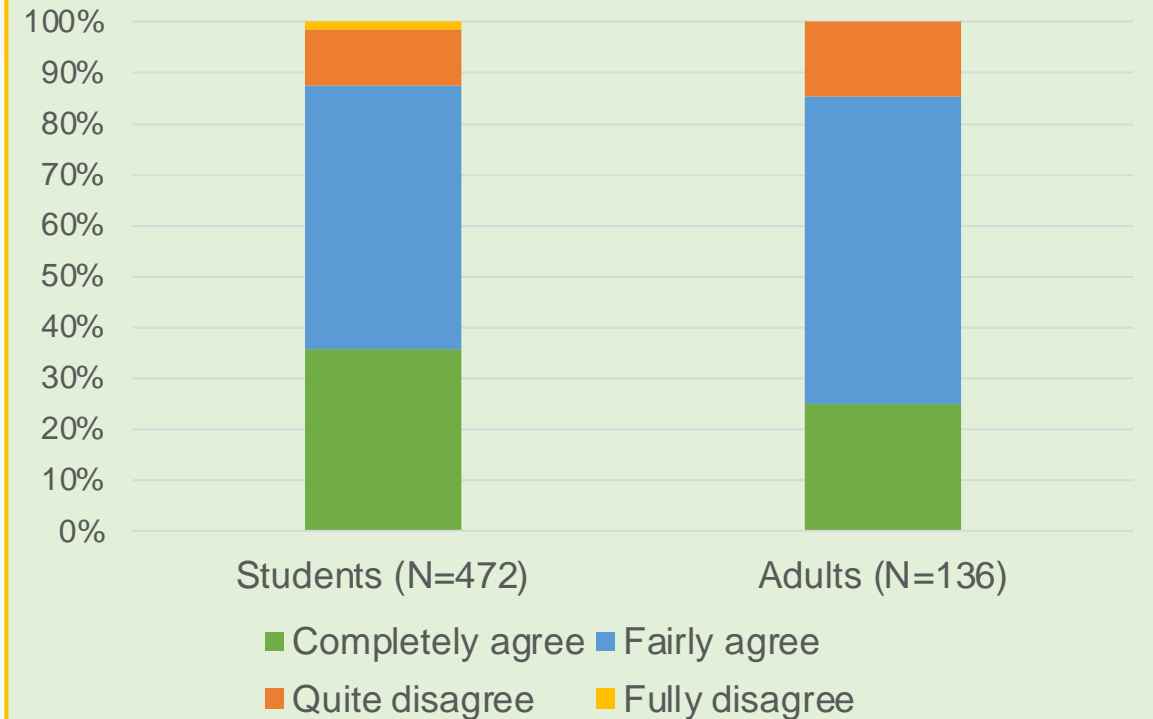
www.marriagerocket.com

Students value the restorative approach even more than adults

When there is a conflict, students are listened to in our school



Verso peer mediation increases safeness in our school



National Education Evaluation Center (KARVI) 2022:

Students' participation in increasing safe school community should be strengthened



KIUSAAMISTA EHKÄISEVIEN
SEKÄ HYVINVOINTIA JA
TYÖRAUHAA PARANTAVIEN
MENETELMIEN ARVIOINTI

Keskeisimmät tulokset seitsemästä arvioidusta menetelmästä



TIIVISTELMÄT 10:2022

The data collected from the students (N=12000) showed that it is particularly important to strengthen the students' trust that the adults in the school have the will to intervene in bullying.

It is very important that the students are actively involved in planning and developing their school's antibullying work in order to promote a good team spirit and to prevent bullying and misbehavior.

Building positive trust between students and teachers is a key factor, if we want that students are not afraid to express the misbehavior they have experienced.

40% of the students who answered said that they want to have an active role in preventing bullying, misbehavior, violence and exclusion at their own school.

VERSO
OHJELMA

KARVI 2022: The strengths of Verso - peer mediation

From a usability perspective:

- Verso - Peer mediation works well for solving conflicts between students and gives the parties responsibility for resolving their own conflicts.
- Students interested in acting as peer mediators -> a method also considered good by students.
- The VERSO-program offers a lot of training and material to support Verso - peer mediation -> using the method in schools has been made easy.

From a rootability perspective:

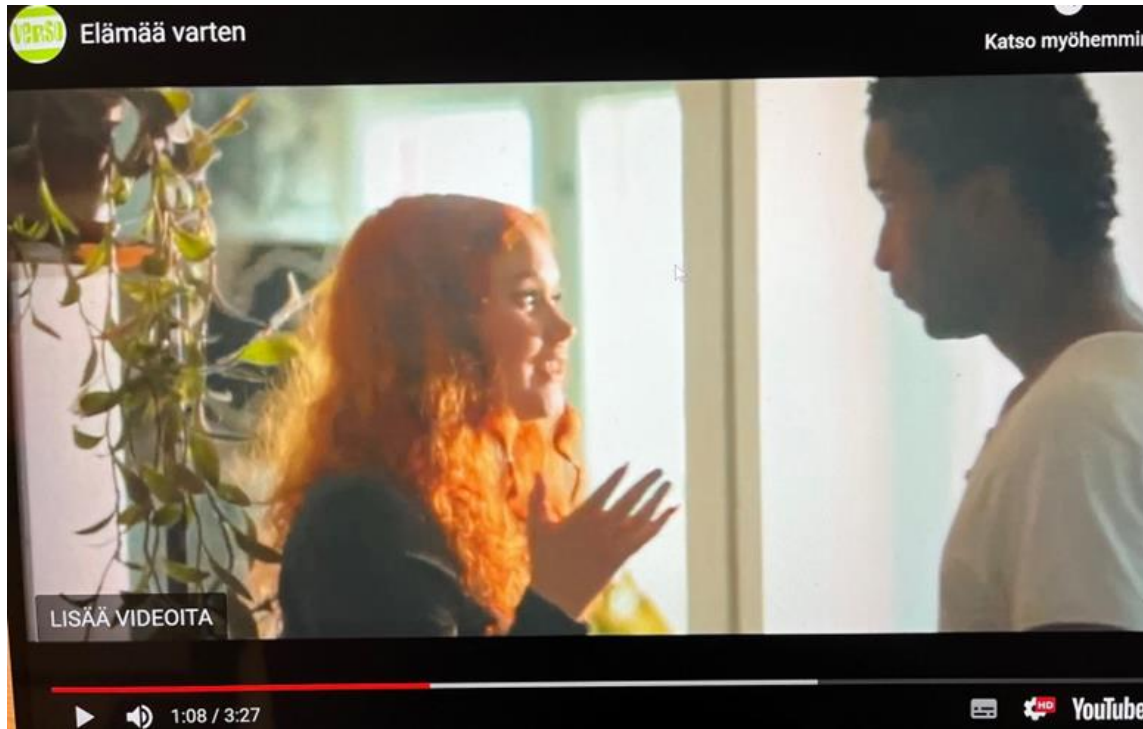
- It is easy to implement the restorative practices also in teaching and other activities of the school.
- The use of the method requires the commitment of the staff -> based on the data, it has generally been implemented well in schools.
- The management's support for the use of the method and the good experience of the personnel in the use of the method are important.

From an effectiveness perspective:

- Increase students' responsibility and agreeing together.
- With the help of peer mediators, conflicts between students can often be resolved without the help of adults.
- Most of the resolved conflicts lead to an agreement, and the situations will not repeat.
- Case-by-case evaluation relevant -> adult-led mediation to help resolve conflicts unsuitable for peer mediation.



The strength of peers = peer power



”For life” video in English:

In web site: <https://sovittelu.com/vertaissovittelu/in-english/>

In Youtube: <https://youtu.Be/3bpaqmkgna4>

VERSO
OHJELMA



Widening
the circle
is about
opening
our minds

**Peer power is an
opportunity!**

**Let's give this opportunity
a chance!**

Thank you!

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Some articles

Chapman T., Aertsen I., Anderson M., Gellin M. 2015. Protecting Rights, Restoring Respect and Strengthening Relationships: A European model for Restorative Justice with Children and Young People. Vol II. Brussels: OIJJ / ECJJ. Find the report from our website: <https://sovittelu.com/vertaissovittelu/in-english/>

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