

Peer Mediation Services for Conflict Resolution in Schools – What transformations in school culture characterise successful implementation?

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Introduction

This paper focuses on peer mediation as a specific form of restorative practice in schools and presents the findings from research conducted at 9 schools (7 primary, 2 secondary) in England, which had previously implemented a mediation service as an alternative to teacher arbitration for students experiencing 'difficult' interpersonal conflict. This analysis was informed by themes from a previous stage of research conducted at one additional primary school, where the process from pre to post service implementation had been observed in greater detail.

The analysis utilises activity theory as a conceptual framework for understanding and describing cultural processes affecting the implementation of peer mediation services. In depth knowledge of this approach is not essential to engaging with the themes described but how this approach informed the research design and analysis will be briefly explained as it may have implications for our discussion about the types of research that could be done in the future.

The findings of this research highlight the need for realistic anticipation of the degree of cultural transformation required to fully support approaches that offer

some form of empowerment to students in schools. One could argue, and it may also be interesting to discuss this later, that an emphasis on intervention (and intervention based research) detracts attention from cultural change. It also raises the point that such approaches are perhaps not as empowering as one would initially think and thus warrant scrutiny of the roles, relationships and tools adopted by restorative approaches in schools. Peer mediation was however most successful in schools where there was a considerable shift in roles and perceptions of power, accompanied by the production of new cultural tools that promoted new ways of thinking, speaking and acting with regard to conflict.

Throughout the paper, some of the implications of this type of research for practice in schools and questions for further discussion at the Edinburgh seminar will be highlighted.

Learning about conflict

As most delegates at the Edinburgh seminar will be familiar with the principles of restorative approaches and how they differ to contrasting approaches, the text will move swiftly to the discussion of the research. However, it may be useful to hold in mind the following points about restorative approaches, such as mediation in schools, and the way these services may be implemented.

1) The *pedagogy* of mediation training is very different to other forms of education about conflict. Most children learn about conflict informally in their relationships with their peers, siblings and authority figures. Analysis of conflict is rarely deep as conflicts are frequently avoided or resolved rather quickly in favour of the disputant with the greatest power in that context. In contrast, mediation training is underpinned by humanistic values though is actually quite

formal; there are rules, stages and communicational practices to be followed. Superficially at least, parties are equal in power and status.

2) Engaging with restorative approaches as either a user or mediator is different to learning about conflict via a curriculum topic such as citizenship. Curriculum approaches may have considerable merit, though if not accompanied by an experiential element can construct students as citizens 'to be' rather than citizens 'in situ'. As a result, issues relating to conflict management are taught in lessons, representing knowledge to be taken into the adult world in the future, rather than organizational affordances made to facilitate democratic engagement in the present (Hicks 2001, Rudduck and Fielding 2006). There is also education about conflict through the hidden curriculum (certain views of history in taught subjects, models of moral behaviour implicit in school rules etc). However, any such dynamic will also infiltrate mediation training as it also will not be immune to 'hidden messages'.

The research shared in this paper will highlight that restorative approaches such as mediation frequently underestimate the degree, and complexity, of cultural transformation required for such services to be maintained and have any impact. One aspect of such transformation often shared in a limited literature is the need to reassess power relations between teachers, other adults in schools, and students (Griffith 1996, Knight & Sked 1998, Sellman 2003, Tyrell 2002, Rudduck and Fielding 2006, Wyness 2006) – which will be a recurring theme for further discussion in this paper. Researchers and educationalists may therefore benefit from a more refined analysis of the problematic practices between current/historical approaches and innovations planned. In this paper, activity theory is used to begin to describe contradictions between traditional and innovative practices and the transformation involved in resolving these differences.

Research Design

Conceptual framework: The utility of activity theory for modelling and understanding transformational processes in schools

The design of this research commenced with a desire to better understand the relationship between cultural and interactional levels of analysis in schools. Activity theory was selected as a theoretical approach suitable for achieving this. The 'activity system' (Engestrom 1987, 1999a, Hedegaard & Sigersted 1992) in particular was a useful unit of analysis for depicting informing intervention-based research, i.e. what happens after something new is implemented.

As an example of how this theory guided the analytical approach adopted it may be helpful to consider the centrality of the concept of 'contradiction' for activity theory researchers. A shortcoming of many attempts to reduce violence in schools is an underestimation of the degree of modification required for a new model of activity to be successfully implemented. Existing structures (e.g. teacher centred power relations) may often 'contradict' the innovative practice planned (e.g. Rudduck & Fielding 2006, Tyrell 2002, Wyness 2006). The aggravation and analysis of such contradictions during periods of transformation is a central feature of activity theory research. Engestrom (1999b) states,

when an activity system adopts a new element from the outside (*for example, a peer mediation service*), it often leads to an aggravated secondary contradiction where some old element collides with the new one.

(Engestrom 1999b, p. 5, addition in italics)

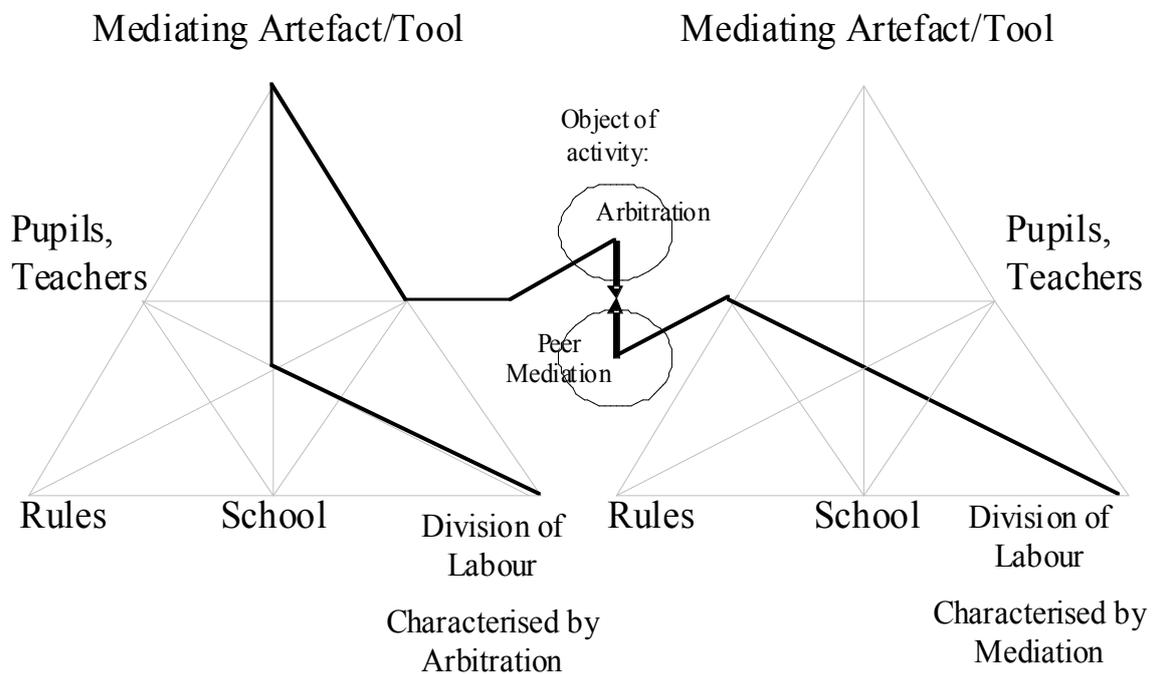


Figure 1: contradiction between two alternative models of activity

The 'traditional' approach of resolving more difficult conflict in schools by adult arbitration is built upon radically opposing principles of power and control to that of peer mediation (Cohen 1995, Griffith 1996, Sellman 2003, Tyrell 2002), a point for extended discussion in subsequent sections. Such a relationship can be represented as a contradiction between the innovative model of activity (peer mediation) and the division of labour of the traditional activity (i.e. arbitration by teachers as the dominant form of conflict resolution), as shown in figure 1.

Such a unit of analysis does have some limitations for the study of comparative models of activity. Daniels (2001a, 2001b) argues that the concepts of activity theory require a greater language of description. Daniels (2001b) suggests the use of Bernstein's (2000) theory of cultural transmission for such a task. Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing are thus useful here (Daniels

et al 1996). Briefly, 'classification' refers to the degree of insulation between categories (curriculum subjects, teachers/pupils). These are said to be strong or weak dependent on the explicitness of boundaries between them and the degree of specialisation within. 'Framing' refers to the regulation of communication between social relations and their physical organisation within the school. Overall, where classification and framing is weak, practice is more seamless and order is regulated more horizontally. Where classification and framing is strong, there will be clear demarcations and relations between parties will be more hierarchical.

Bernstein's (2000) language of description informed the analysis of the strength of classification reported by interviewees between people enacting certain roles when resolving conflict and the explicitness of rules framing such an activity. The research was thus able to focus upon whether forms of social organisation (e.g. who resolves conflict and how) are transformed by intervention (peer mediation training) and subsequent impact.

Method

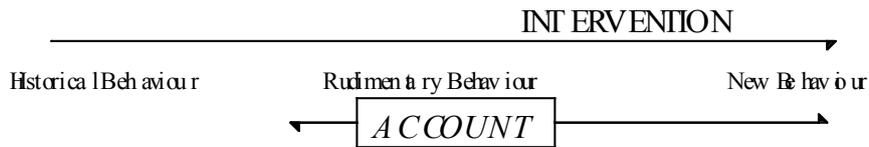
In Vygotsky's (1978) consideration of method, he argued the need to artificially provoke development as a means to its study. Engestrom (1999a) describes how Sylvia Scribner has demonstrated that Vygotsky's ideas concerning appropriate method cannot be reduced to a single technique. Instead, she suggests four steps in conducting research, these are:

1. Observation of behaviour in the current context. This is sometimes referred to as 'rudimentary' behaviour, meaning behaviour that has lost its history such as professional practice that is reproduced in an unquestioned or non-reflective manner.

2. Reconstruction and description of historical behaviour and how behaviour in the current context came to be.
3. Experimental production of change from rudimentary behaviour through intervention.
4. Observation of the actual development.

To investigate the implementation of peer mediation services and subsequent processes of school transformation, a two stage approach to research was adopted (see figure 2), influenced by Scribner's four steps. In the first stage, these four steps were incorporated into a case study where a peer mediation service was implemented at a primary school, serving a socially and economically diverse community in the middle of England. Pupils, teachers, lunchtime supervisors and the peer mediation trainers from this school were interviewed both pre and post intervention. The emphasis of these interviews was to explore how a selection of conflict scenarios typical to schools (such as peers arguing, fighting, calling each other names, as well as challenges to teacher authority) would be responded to before and after the training. The peer mediation training was also observed. Cumulatively, these data were used to construct an account of the transformation process, with a focus on whether communicational and conflict management practices had been modified in any way some time after the intervention.

Stage 1



Stage 2

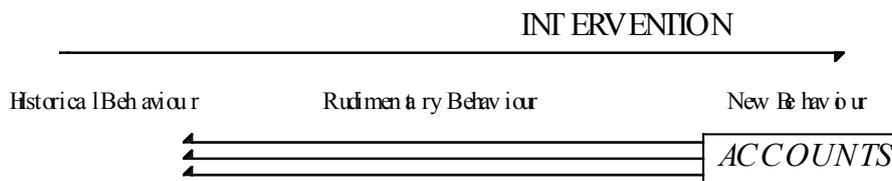


Figure 2: research design

This account was then contrasted in a second stage to the historical accounts of nine other schools (seven primary, two secondary, all also in the Midlands) that had attempted to implement peer mediation with mixed success two years previously (one secondary and six primary schools were still running a service). Teachers from the nine other schools and peer mediation trainers were interviewed retrospectively during stage two. The focus of these interviews was to reflect upon the impact peer mediation may have had since its implementation and any processes that enhanced or impeded any such impact. Themes identified in both stages inform the analysis made and reported in the next section.

Findings: The types of cultural transformation required for alternative models of activity such as peer mediation to be fully and meaningfully implemented

Analysis of the interview data identified three main themes, these were:

- Theme 1: A contradiction between the division of labour underpinning arbitration and mediation
- Theme 2: The need of substantial support for the reconfiguration of division of labour
- Theme 3: The production and endorsement of new cultural tools

The distribution of these themes across the 10 schools from both stages can be seen in the following table.

School	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	J	K
Stage	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Pri/Sec	Pri	Pri	Pri	Pri	Sec	Pri	Pri	Pri	Sec	Pri
Service Status	Running with a positive impact	Running with a limited impact	Running with a limited impact	Abandoned – little/no impact	Abandoned – little/no impact					
Theme 1	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	0	0	0
Theme 2	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	0	0	0
Theme 3	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	-	0	0

Key: +: theme reported positively, 0: theme reported negatively, -: theme not reported/insufficient evidence

Table 1: The distribution of themes across schools from both stages 1 & 2.

Table 1 indicates a clear relationship between each of these themes being positively reported and the status of their peer mediation service. In the two schools where peer mediation training had taken place and a service subsequently introduced but then abandoned, interviewees reported significant issues concerning staff members modifying their perceptions of power and control (theme 1), the degree of support for students to exercise responsibility in this way (theme 2) and changes in communicational practices that would have supported the intervention (theme 3). The inverse pattern can be seen to be generally applicable to schools both sustaining a service and reporting a positive impact. In two cases, interviewees did not identify theme 2. At these schools, interviewees reported a positive experience with regard to the intervention but could not comment on staff support because the service was a relatively new feature. Interestingly, the two schools still running a service but identifying problems and a limited impact, negatively reported the same themes as those schools which had abandoned their services. Each of these themes will now be discussed in turn and will include extracts from the interviews to illustrate key points.

Theme 1: A contradiction between the division of labour underpinning arbitration and mediation

At the school studied in stage one, where peer mediation had been successfully implemented, a clear contradiction between the division of labour underpinning both models of activity (arbitration and mediation) was identified as a significant theme. This contradiction had been resolved to modify the division of labour in favour of mediation and a number of characteristics serve as evidence of this transformation process:

1) Teachers and lunchtime supervisors interviewed about the scheme at the school observed that the service had been popular with pupils and this was connected to the pupil's perception of authority. Pupils could volunteer to have minor conflicts mediated by peers without the threat of sanctions, as one pupil stated,

If we ask the teacher, one of us might be upset because one of us might get into trouble. With peer mediators, you know you're not going to get into trouble.

(Peer mediation client, school A)

2) The shift in division of labour meant that minor conflicts are frequently prevented from escalating and members of staff have greater time free for other activities (which with some irony included arbitrating 'more serious' conflicts) as this comment elucidates,

Dinnertimes seem easier because lunchtime supervisors are not having to deal with the small problems, they're going to peer mediation. They are now able to spend more time with the deeper problems that peer mediation doesn't deal with.

(Teacher, school A)

3) The peer mediators wore red caps to identify themselves on the playground, which communicated a different role and status to other pupils.

4) The pupils exercised some autonomy in maintaining the service for themselves, even drawing up a rotor.

5) To sustain the service, it was planned that the pupils would pass their skills onto replacement peer mediators before they left school at the age of eleven. This form of 'peer apprenticeship' would provide the trainees with additional responsibilities.

Similar shifts in the division of labour were reported by each school successfully sustaining a peer mediation service (table 1). If peer mediation does become the new model of activity for resolving difficult interpersonal conflicts in schools there appears to be a radical reconfiguration of the division of labour and rules of the traditional activity. The 'innovative' or modified activity (peer mediation) is underpinned by principles of power and control in which pupils have a greater role in the regulation of their own and their peers' conflicts. In contrast, the traditional activity (arbitration of conflicts by teachers) is underpinned by principles of teacher-control and authority (as depicted in figure 1). The modification of the traditional activity can be understood as a process in which teachers' perceptions of power and control are re-evaluated (Griffith 1996, Tyrrell 2002). Such a shift represents a translation of some teacher power to some pupils, who use new mediating artefacts/tools (e.g. peer mediation scripts) to help their fellow students (Cohen 1995).

This isn't a straightforward transference of power from adults to all pupils however. More accurately, it is the wider distribution of power to a sub-group of pupils, the mediators, and to a much lesser extent, their clients. As a result, when pupils encounter conflicts that are difficult to resolve independently through negotiation, they now have a greater opportunity to resolve the dispute between themselves and to ask peers to help them in this process rather than adults.

Arbitration	Peer Mediation	Negotiation
Strong classification	Weaker classification between teachers and pupils, stronger classification between pupils and peer mediators	Weak classification
Strong framing	Strong framing	Weak framing

Figure 3: arbitration, mediation and negotiation in terms of classification and framing

Bernstein's (2000) theory of cultural transmission is helpful in elucidating this process. The traditional activity, teacher arbitration, is characterised by strong 'classification and framing', where strict rules for acceptable behaviour apply and sanctions for breaking these rules are enforced by teachers. The relationships between subjects are clearly defined (arbitrator and arbitrated) and the structure of communication reveals the power of one to judge the other and administer appropriate punishment (Cohen 1995, Stacey et al 1997). In contrast, classification and framing when negotiation takes place between equal parties is weak, where horizontally related parties agree a solution between themselves. The innovative activity of peer mediation represents a median between these contrasting approaches (as shown in figure 3). One can understand the transformation of the traditional activity as a process in which there is relinquishment of some teacher power to peer mediators and hence a weakening of 'classification and framing' between teachers and some pupils.

Although horizontal relations underpin the process of peer mediation, peer mediators are trained to halt the process if ground rules are not kept and they often use a script to facilitate the process according to pre-determined stages (Stacey and Robinson 1997, Tyrrell & Farrell 1995). The script used by peer

mediators serves as a framing device, which delineates sequential steps in exploring the problem and generating potential solutions. This process is more formally controlled than in negotiation but less formally controlled than in arbitration (Cohen 1995). It is noteworthy that the scripts commonly used by child mediators are similar in how they delineate the order and manner of questioning to those used in adult contexts (e.g. legal and community based mediation). Although mediators may modify or re-write their scripts, this guise of 'pupil empowerment' is not pupils exercising their own voice but rather learning to apply the voice of adults (with certain values) when resolving conflicts.

Thus, the implementation of peer mediation i) weakens the classification of social relations between teachers and pupils as arbitration is de-formalised in certain situations, and ii) strengthens the relations between some pupils by creating a division of labour in which pupils assume the roles of peer mediators and disputants. The clearest indication of this is the caps or other identifying features worn by peer mediators on the playground, as worn by mediators at all schools still running a service. Whereas such visual demarcations solve a number of practical problems (e.g. how to find a peer mediator on the playground) they also symbolise the creation of a sub-group. These mediators are no longer 'peers', they stand out to others because they have certain skills, roles and responsibilities that are different to others.

Pupil empowerment, in the case of peer mediation at least, does not involve a subversion of the traditional teacher-student power relation but rather a re-organisation of power. Also, teachers at all schools interviewed in stages one and two regarded peer mediation as having less utility for resolving serious conflicts. This represented a tension between staff members who were and were not prepared to 'trust' pupils sufficiently (Tyrell 2002). Hence, the principles of power and control underpinning the activity of resolving 'serious' conflicts usually remains strongly classified and framed.

Discussion point 1

Restorative approaches are often claimed to empower, though the research reported here suggests this empowerment is underpinned by tools that are laden with certain values. Is this a problem? If it is, how can restorative tools incorporate diversity? And given their emphasis on literacy, what alternatives are there and evidence of their utility? If it isn't a problem, how can the values of restorative approaches be made more explicit and inform the culture of the school? The type of empowerment provided by mediation training can also be 'selective'. Unless everybody is trained to mediate, learning about restorative practice occurs only for trainees and their clients. How can cultures be created where everybody learns about restorative practice?

Theme 2: The need of substantial support for the reconfiguration of division of labour

For a shift in the division of labour to occur there needs to be a 'critical mass' of support for reconfiguration of activity regarding the management of conflict, as a peer mediation trainer observes,

If there's only one committed member of staff its not enough for the work to survive. In the end they find it too difficult to maintain what they have started. There needs to be a definite commitment in senior management plus a reasonable number of other supporters. It's the concept of critical mass; it doesn't have to be everyone but a mass large enough so that the others will sway their way rather than overwhelm them with indifference and hostility.

(Peer mediation trainer)

In schools where a critical mass of support is achieved, the reconfiguration of the traditional activity is sufficient enough to ensure that the rules and division of labour for resolving conflict are consistent and complementary across the school. In such cases, the new mediating artefacts/tools (i.e. new ways of talking about conflict) produced by the intervention are more widely used. When this doesn't happen, which may sometimes be compounded by curriculum and organisational issues, the school encounters problems in implementing and/or sustaining such services. This appeared to be the case in those schools that assumed they could develop conflict resolution skills via teaching such skills as a solitary addition to the curriculum, without sufficient attention to cultural processes (Clough and Holden 2002). Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997) argue that interventions often focus their attention on the behaviour of individuals rather than social and cultural practices. Yet, such factors are crucial ingredients in whether initiatives are successful or not (Cowie and Jenifer 2007). Research by Griffith (1996), Knight & Sked (1998), Stacey et al (1997), Tyrrell (2002) and Sellman (2003) has highlighted that peer mediation fails to become established when whole school issues are inadequately considered.

One Deputy Headteacher, reflecting on the failure to sustain peer mediation at a secondary school was forthright with his analysis,

The aims were isolated...and to try and do it for one hour a week when for the other twenty hours a week, the regime was totally different... teachers react to small groups of disruptive children by exerting their influence and control. Discipline across the school was teacher led and then they came to this one PHSE lesson where that didn't apply, where they were given responsibility for their own behaviour and they didn't cope with it very well.

(Deputy Headteacher, School J)

Similarly, another teacher drew attention to similar contradictions at his school, when asked, 'What are the differences and similarities between the school culture and the intervention?'

All the systems of reward and punishment are teacher lead and mediation isn't and the two things really are (knocks fists together) going to clash. They're mutually exclusive.

(Teacher, School H, author's comment in brackets)

These extracts highlight the need for consistency between the principles of power and control underpinning peer mediation and ways of managing behaviour throughout schools. When the cultural artefacts/tools produced by peer mediation training are not reproduced and distributed in a school because they contradict the dominant activity, any attempt at pupil empowerment risks becoming either tokenistic and/or fragmented (it only happens at certain times, in certain places, for limited purposes). In these schools, peer mediation is often a 'bolt on feature' (Stacey et al 1997, Tyrrell 2002) and soon dissipates. However, when such issues are resolved, reconfigured activity is accompanied with the production of new linguistic and psychological possibilities, as the next section will discuss.

The speakers from seminar 2 offer valuable insights in relation to these points. Van Ness (2010) discussed the relationship between restorative justice and world view, alerting us to the need, to move away from an instrumental conceptualisation of restorative practice, which focuses on approaches and techniques. Instead, he suggested greater attention needs to be paid to the context in which restorative approaches are located, and in schools this concerns the cultural characteristics of institutions. In this regard, a great deal can be learned from indigenous communities and their broader respect for the environment they inhabit and the community to which they belong. Many such

cultures have been associated with restorative principles, however such approaches are not seen as a technique for controlling the disorder of an individual in such communities but rather as a principle binding the community together in a cohesive and sustainable manner.

Similar observations were apparent in the contexts of New Zealand and South Africa, which were reported by Drewery (2010) and Lephala (2010) respectively. In New Zealand, restorative approaches are much more established in the education and youth justice systems. Drewery (2010) emphasised the need for a whole school culture supportive of restorative approaches, though what qualifies as such does not need to be the same in every school. This is frequently challenged by the school's focus on the individual. Hence, there is a need for a paradigm shift from a modernist perspective that focuses on fix to a more humanistic, restorative or even ecological paradigm, emphasising community and the individual's role and dignity within that community. The research reported here is perhaps limited by its emphasis on intervention effectiveness in relation to 'types' of culture rather than a culture first conceptualisation, where culture represents the context in which restorative approaches almost appear as the 'natural' way of doing things in light of the types of relationships encouraged in such cultures. Nonetheless, elements of culture supporting restorative approaches will certainly include many of the features reported here, notably around relationships and language.

Discussion point 2

Implementing restorative approaches may underestimate the degree of cultural transformation required, especially when such approaches are implemented as 'intervention's. How can 'restorative cultures' be achieved as an alternative to the intervention or quick-fix model?

Theme 3: The production and endorsement of new cultural tools

In stage one, those trained as peer mediators and their class-teacher reported that they found the peer mediation script, a useful tool. Those interviewed, recounted the sections of the script and suggested that the script was also used in other situations, as with the following sequence from a pupil interview.

R: What kinds of conflict did you experience before being trained as a peer mediator?

P: Usually a lot of people arguing and shouting at each other and everybody else not knowing what to do, usually just standing in the background not knowing what to do so the fight would go on and get worse.

R: Would you have been one of those standing in the background?

P: Yes, because I wouldn't know what to do.

R: And has that changed at all?

P: I'm now trying to sort out the problems before it gets too violent.

R: How do you do that?

P: Well, I go in and ask them to calm down and ask them the different questions and try to make them see that its not what they think it is and that its different and then they should see that its not a fighting matter and should make friends.

R: And what questions do you use?

P: I ask them what's happened and who's doing it with them if the others have gone off, and then we go and find them and ask them to explain what's happened, the other person explains what's happened and then think about the two things that they've said and then give them a few ideas and think about what to do next.

R: Where do those questions come from?

- P: The scripts, I use some of the words that are on the script.
- R: When do you use those scripts?
- P: When we're peer mediating at the moment, but we usually remember them and we use them outside as well.

The underlined segment in this sequence outlines the stages of the peer mediation script, minus a question about feelings. It is possible that the pupil is using the voice of the script. Her account suggests that many characteristics of this new tool have been internalised. If her own account is accepted, the tool has shaped some of her thought processes but now she reports beginning to apply the tool in familiar situations.

The accounts of pupils and teachers at schools where peer mediation had been successful suggest that peer mediation training produced new forms of social relations, which involved the use of new mediating artefacts/tools such as the peer mediation script. The use of these new tools creates opportunities for new ways of thinking and acting with regard to conflict. The previous sequence showed how one pupil used the script to regulate her own thinking, speaking and acting in conflict situations. Such appropriation was not restricted to pupils however. One class-teacher described how she now used a 'talking-stone' to encourage turn-talking between students if they were arguing, whilst another described how he used the peer mediation script to regulate his own management of pupils experiencing a conflict in the classroom. Talking about the impact of the intervention on his own practice, he stated:

"I think I am better now at talking with the children over a problem. I actually do use the peer mediation script when I'm dealing with two children. I don't read it out but I know the sorts of, the way to talk, to get one child saying something and then saying to the other and making more of a tennis match, if you like, between the two children. Whereas originally, I would have spoke individually to the one with them standing in front of me and individually to the other. Instead now, I'm more, we'll

hear the one side, we'll hear the other side and then we'll hear what that person's going to do and what the other person's going to do instead of doing it in big blocks. And I think they've got that better now because they immediately hear how each other is feeling".

(Teacher, school B)

Here again, the teacher alludes to ventriloquising the stages of the peer mediation script but shows how he has made the tool serve his own ends. In this example, the language used by the teacher, when he would have once arbitrated the conflict, has been modified. The teacher uses the new tool in a way that is reminiscent of the relationship between speech and tool use described by Vygotsky (1978). When individuals encounter a difficult task, they often resort to externalised speech and the use of semiotic tools (social in origin) to structure their speech. In this particular case, the teacher uses the peer mediation script, which translates a certain set of social relations into principles of communication. By replicating the tool in his own classroom practice, he helps to reinforce the new model of activity (mediation rather than arbitration), a step that is perhaps central to establishing a new form of practice across the school. If mediation techniques are used pervasively as management techniques, a peer mediation service will have a far greater chance of success as the principles of power and control underpinning both activities are more consistent.

When students used these tools effectively, teachers commented that it introduced a new stage to their thinking processes:

A big problem here, is that the children's background encourages them to think of physical retaliation as their first response. If you said 'why did you do that?', expecting some deep rooted problem, he'll say 'he was in front of me, or he looked at me'. We noticed that the impact of the course and the work teachers

did before and after could extend the pause, the gap between action and reaction.

(Headteacher, school E)

Tentatively, such observations suggest that pupils connected with peer mediation may be adopting a more pro-active identity in the conflict management process. Sfard and Prusak (2005) define 'identity' as the stories an individual agent tells, about a subject, to an audience. When a conflict is arbitrated, the 'story' of a pupil's conflict is told to them by an adult. This reinforces the notion that their conflict is something over which they have little or no control or authority. When a conflict is mediated, as the Headteacher testifies, there is a potential identity shift. Instead, the pupil participates in creating and proposing a shared 'story' about the conflict, of which they feel greater ownership and ability to participate in its resolution.

The transformation the Headteacher suggests is taking place here indicates that if pupils are given the opportunity for greater and more meaningful involvement, particularly in those areas of school life traditionally reserved for teacher regulation, students can demonstrate potentially significant gains in learning and identity development, i.e. they acquire the *skills* to resolve conflict constructively and they *expect* to be involved in the process. If students are to be able to manage their own conflicts effectively, not only do they need to be given the tools to do this but school organisation also needs to be sufficiently transformed in order to allow them to genuinely employ these tools. As well as being trained in restorative approaches and having genuine opportunities to use them, critical literacy may have a role to play here. Cultures offering students the opportunity to develop such skills also offer them the opportunity to analyse both interpersonal and structural conflicts.

Discussion point 3

The research reported here included participants' views, but perhaps in a limited way as they were subjects of the research rather than co-researchers. The impact of other research into restorative approaches in schools has sometimes used crude measures in an attempt to measure effectiveness. How can restorative approaches (and accompanying cultural change) best be accounted for? As a point of consistency with the underpinning philosophy of restorative approaches, is there a greater role for participants in this process?

Summary and conclusions

The findings reported in this paper suggest that the frequent shortcoming of peer mediation services can be explained by a school's failure to modify traditional activities to incorporate the new rules, means of dividing labour and mediational artefacts/tools produced. Schools perhaps underestimate the degree to which principles of power and control underpinning the traditional activity have to be transformed in order for new models of activity to be implemented. In research by Tyrell (2002) and Sellman (2003), this was a psychological issue concerning teachers' perception of authority rather than a practical issue concerning resources. Broadwood (2000) states that a successful peer mediation service has to be compatible with a school's vision and its approach to regulating social relations. This is characterised by clear and consistent means for dealing with conflict, which are modelled by all teachers and reproduced in their management style. Schools that implement initiatives as if they can be 'bolted upon' existing structures, determined by adults, are unlikely to both sustain the initiative and reap any benefits without radical appraisal and transformation of the structure of relevant activities in school (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997, Wyness 2006).

Those schools where peer mediation has been both successful and sustained for several years are underpinned by consistent principles of power and control, as embodied by communicational practices, between management strategies used by adults and the philosophy underpinning mediation. It would appear then that a key feature of pupil empowerment may not be schools with pupil empowerment initiatives but rather schools that create the conditions in which pupil empowerment initiatives thrive.

NB - A longer version of this paper, without discussion points, is available:

Sellman, E. (2011) Peer Mediation Services for Conflict Resolution in Schools – What transformations in activity characterise successful implementation? *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(1), 45-60.

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