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Peer mediation in schools

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Abstract

Mediation is a conflict resolution process run by a specialist third party who called mediator. Mediation process focuses on conflict resolution. Conflict in school setting is a major problem for educators and administrators and it is prevalent and common all over the world. It may induce act of violence. There is a strong tendency to use an accusive and defensive language among people. People are not naturally use these unbeseeing communication patterns but learn it from her/his environment. That's why it's so important to upskill the children to have inclusive, reconciliatory and empathetic attitude. In this study mediation, mediation process and peer mediation will be discussed.

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Keywords:

Introduction

Conflict and violence in school setting is a major problem for students, educators and administrators. Destructive behavioural patterns are quite prevalent and common all over the world in school setting also it is getting hard to create a safe, progress-oriented and socially-oriented schools. Nevertheless it is important to ensure school safety for children and adolescents. In this study, need of building a safe and supportive environment, teaching

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alternative way of conflict resolution, function of mediation in school setting and peer mediation's components and the peer mediation process will be discussed.

Nomenclature

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| A | Building a safe and supportive environment |
| B | Teaching nonviolent conflict resolution to students |
| C | Mediation in school setting |
| D | Peer mediation: students as peacemakers |

1. Building a Safe And Supportive Environment

A supportive and safe school climate can help preventing violence. All components of school should feel safe and interact each other everywhere in school campus. However it is not easy to create an order like this. In general, school discipline systems are external locus of control. Strong tendency is imposing penalties to students in case of behave improperly in school settings. Students act properly to avoid punishment as it is. Because it makes pressure on them. Such an oppressive attitude undermine students' self-confidence and self-worth. So, it is not the best way to teach effective communication skills nor a desired method for academic and social development. There is more instructive way of learning: peer mediation. This issue will be discussed in detail afterwards.

One of the most fundamental need of human being is "safety". It is determinative in evolution of self-conception and attitudes. If "safety need" does not respond, aberrant behaviours may occur. Similarly, if school setting is not safe nor the school personnel is supportive, then increasing of conflict and violence is inescapable. So, transforming the entire school culture into collaborative and problem solving communities is a vital necessity.

Schools are not just institutions designed for academical improvement but social evolution of children and youth. People mostly learn through their experiences. In this case, school's composition is very important as a primary social environment. Therefore, as Gauley (2006) said, social and emotional learning need to be incorporated and the students must be involved in the process actively. Also it requires collective efforts of all components of school (students, teachers, managers, parents etc.) (Blum, 2005). When safe and supportive environment build up, students strengthen and enhance their coping skills.

2. Teaching Nonviolent Conflict Resolution to Students

Cooperation, tolerance and acceptance of diversity is fundamental to manage a conflict. One of the conflict solution method is mediation. The conflicts have always existed and will be exist in institutions where a wide range of people come together (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2002). It is difficult to wipe out but possible to find solutions for creating positive behaviours so positive environment. One of these solutions is peer mediation.

Peer mediation is both a program and a process. This program and process simply involves learning to handle conflict. Peer mediation has a major role of reducing conflict, develop positive behaviours, support student's assertiveness, promote developing of democracy culture etc. Peer mediation helps students to internalize communicate with people in a health manner. The mediation process led by students. By the way, students learn to be neutral and can evaluate the situation in empathic manner and gain internal control over her/his attitudes and behaviours. So, It is important to keep in mind that interaction focused and student centered programs like the peer mediation program can increase social harmony

3. Mediation in School Setting

Mediation is a conflict resolution process run by a specialist third party who called mediator (The Association for Conflict Resolution [ACR], 2007). Arguments, fights, rumors and partner conflicts are the most common conflicts between friends (Haft & Weiss, 1998). Mediation process focuses on conflict resolution. Conflict in school setting is a major problem for educators and administrators and it is prevalent and common all over the world. It may induce act of violence. There is a strong tendency to use an accusive and defensive language among people. People are not naturally use these unbeseeing communication patterns but learn it from her/his environment. That's why it's so important to upskill the children to have inclusive, reconciliatory and empathetic attitude. Mediation process gives opportunity students to look in through one's perspective.

Peer mediation is a bit different then common mediation in a manner. In peer mediation, mediator is a student too. According to Opffer (1997) who is a trainer for the Community Board Program in San Francisco, peer mediators learn following concepts and skills:

- “The dynamics of conflict, and how to manage it constructively,
- Problem solving steps,
- Effective listening and speaking skills for developing interpersonal understanding,
- and how to work cooperatively”

4. Peer Mediation: Students as Peacemakers

According to Thomas (2008), “peer mediation is a restorative manner of conflict resolution between persons where a neutral third party from one's peer group attends the persons in conflict while the persons in conflict negotiate a mutual agreement.” As emphasized in the statement, student's themselves are active in conflict solution process. Being active strengthen the students' internal locus of control. With this respect mediation process helps one's individualization.

Peer mediator is a student in the same age as conflicted parties. The peer mediator generally nominated by students or school social workers. Peer mediator should have some characteristics like sound judgment, leadership abilities, excellent communication skills, and credibility with peers. It is not necessary to have superior academic achievement (Chittooran & Hoenig, 2010). Ability of making transactional analysis and empathetic listening is more important.

A representative steps of peer mediation sessions are:

- Open the session: Conflicted parties are seated face to face each other and the peer mediator have a seat between them. Both disputants and mediator introduce oneself. The peer mediator explains the purpose of peer mediation, briefly describes the process, and then they states the rules together.
- Identify the problem and gather information: The disputants are asked for their version of the problem. It is important to keeping eye contact, being an empathetic listener, and facilitator.
- Focus on common interests: In this stage, common interests are identify. The prime mover is clarifying the goals
- Generate options for problem solution: Brainstorming is commonly used in this stage. It is important to find solutions as much as disputants can.
- Evaluate options and choose a solution: The disputants evaluate their solutions. The disputants need to get on with the best solution which meets both their needs.
- Develop an agreement and commit to it: The disputants state their roles and responsibilities in problem solution then they make an agreement It is written down and sign by disputants and peer mediator (Chittooran & Hoenig, 2010: IREX, 2013: Johnson & Snow, 2002).

Training students as peer mediators will help to create peaceful school setting by enhancing social harmony.

5. Conclusion

Peer mediation commonly used in school setting, especially in developed country. Because it is known healthy communication's worth. So, it is important to empower students, teachers, managers and parents to build a peaceful environment. By the way, this wave will affect the bigger environment, the community and the whole society. Under the circumstances it is a major need of promoting peer mediation program in school setting to make a change, make a difference.

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