

# Beyond conflict resolution: socio-emotional learning in student mediators

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** In recent years many schools have introduced peer mediation as a method to improve coexistence. However, little has been done in the way of empirical evaluation of school mediation services. The aim of this research, therefore, was to understand the benefits of mediation from an educational and transformational perspective, by analyzing how it has promoted socio-emotional learning in student mediators.

**Method.** The perception of social-emotional learning acquired through mediation was analyzed in a sample of 157 student mediators, including both active and former mediators from 10 public and private/charter schools in Malaga. We also analyzed how certain variables of the mediation process and the social validity of that process relate to the perception of socio-emotional learning. In addition, the perspective of the former mediators was analyzed in order to learn whether their learning outcomes are maintained and transferred to other areas of life.

**Results.** Students perceived that their experience as mediators has fostered the acquisition of socio-emotional learning, emphasizing empathy, neutrality, alternative thinking and the importance of knowing how to ask for help. In addition, the number of mediations in which they had participated, and the perception of utility and social validity were positively related to the development of socio-emotional learning. It should be noted that no significant differences were found between the learning outcomes reported by the active mediators and by the former mediators, although the latter were better able to identify the specific benefits gained from the school mediation experience.

**Discussion and conclusions.** Peer mediation, besides being a method for managing conflicts and for improved coexistence at school, promotes socio-emotional learning in peer mediators; this learning is maintained over time and extends beyond the school context. Study findings support the educational and transformational potential of school mediation.

**Key words:** Peer mediation; mediators; benefits of mediation; socio-affective learning.

## Resumen

**Introducción.** En los últimos años son muchos los centros educativos que han introducido la mediación entre iguales como medida para la mejora de la convivencia. Sin embargo, la evaluación empírica de los servicios de mediación escolar es escasa. Por ello, el objetivo de este trabajo es conocer los beneficios de la mediación desde una perspectiva educativa y transformativa analizando la promoción de aprendizajes socioemocionales en el alumnado mediador.

**Método.** En una muestra de 157 estudiantes mediadores, formada por mediadores en activo y antiguos mediadores, de 10 centros públicos y concertados-privados de Málaga, se ha analizado la percepción de aprendizajes socioemocionales adquiridos a través de la mediación. También se ha analizado la relación entre determinadas variables del proceso de mediación y validez social del mismo, y la percepción de aprendizajes socioemocionales. Asimismo, se analiza la perspectiva de los antiguos mediadores para conocer si los aprendizajes perduran y se transfieren a otros ámbitos de su vida.

**Results.** Los estudiantes perciben que su experiencia como mediadores ha fomentado la adquisición de aprendizajes socioemocionales, destacándose la empatía, la neutralidad, el pensamiento alternativo y la importancia de saber pedir ayuda. Además, el número de mediaciones en las que se ha participado y la percepción de utilidad y validez social se relacionan positivamente con la promoción de aprendizajes socioemocionales. Cabe destacar que no se hallan diferencias significativas entre los aprendizajes informados por los mediadores en activo y los antiguos mediadores, teniendo estos últimos mayor capacidad para identificar cuáles son los beneficios concretos que les ha aportado la mediación escolar.

**Discusión y conclusiones.** La mediación entre iguales, además de ser una medida que permite gestionar los conflictos y mejorar la convivencia escolar, favorece la adquisición de aprendizajes socioemocionales en el alumnado mediador, perdurando en el tiempo y trascendiendo al ámbito escolar. Los resultados del estudio avalan el potencial educativo y transformativo de la mediación escolar.

**Palabras clave:** Mediación entre iguales; mediadores; beneficios de la mediación; aprendizaje socioafectivo.

## Introduction

Strategies used for conflict resolution are related to the beliefs and values of society at any given moment in history. In recent decades, we can identify a change in the structure of interpersonal relations in different spheres of society, moving from vertical relations based on “domination-submission” to relations where equality and horizontality are predominant (Santos-Gómez, 2006). In this context, new ways of living together and resolving conflict must be established at school, in accordance with a society that understands human relations from the basis of equality and cooperation. Hence, implementation of school mediation is on the rise (Viana-Orta, 2013).

More and more authors consider school mediation to be an essential instrument for improving life together at school because of the educational opportunities that it offers, beyond the resolution of conflicts (Boqué, 2003; Cowie & Fernández, 2006; García-Raga, Chiva, Moral & Ramos, 2016; Ibarrolla-García & Iriarte, 2013; Lozano-Martín, Gutiérrez-Extremera & Martínez-Martín, 2018; Ortega & del Rey, 2006; Torrego & Galán, 2008). All these authors share the perspective that conflict is not something negative in itself; depending on the way conflict is resolved, it will either become a relational problem, or an opportunity for change, for learning communicative competencies and values, and for enriching interpersonal relations.

Most schools are implementing school mediation from the philosophy of peer mediation, in other words, training students in mediation so that they themselves can mediate between their classmates. Specifically, student mediators help the parties in conflict to recognize individual responsibility and to seek an agreement on problem-solving actions that cause the least psychological, social and moral harm to the main players and to other affected parties (Ortega & del Rey, 2006). Pulido, Martín-Seoane and Lucas-Molina (2013) support this idea of the great emotional impact of receiving help from a peer, even if it is only being listened to, or as a support network for finding other resources.

In this regard, Viana-Orta (2013) states that one of the reasons mediation has spread so rapidly is because of its huge educational potential for whole-person development; like other authors, she feels that mediation could become an engine of social change (Boqué, 2003; Corbo, 1999; Ibarrolla-García & Iriarte, 2012; Lozano-Martín et al., 2018; Mac-Cragh &

Munné, 2006; Sánchez-García-Arista, 2014; Tuvilla, 2004). All these authors present mediation from a transformational perspective, that is, mediation as an educational tool whereby we can generate the changes needed in current social culture, as a tool that involves real transformation in the personal, interpersonal and contextual dimensions.

García-Raga and Crespo-Ginés (2012) concur with this point of view; the purpose of school mediation is not so much to reach an agreement as to reestablish the relationship, encourage interpersonal and inter-group communication, construct common spaces, and foster the formulation of proposals and solutions for the future, in a framework of tolerance and respect. In the same line, Sánchez-Cánovas (2013) considers mediation to be a kind of learning, a training in skills that foster student participation. According to Smith, Daunic, Miller and Robinson (2002), mediation contributes to creating a better climate that facilitates educational activity, it inculcates attitudes of respect and of valuing what is different, it promotes understanding of the personal interests of those around us and of our own group, encourages cooperation, helps us understand house rules and encourages communication and interpersonal relations. Moreover, other benefits of mediation are also mentioned frequently, such as encouraging students' autonomy and social skills, improved school climate, and reduced rates of bullying and victimization (Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006; Smith, 2011; Villanueva, Usó & Adrián, 2013).

In addition, for students with violent behavior problems and who lack interpersonal skills with their peers, peer mediation adds several other benefits, both in the school context as well as in leisure time. According to Pulido et al. (2013), students receive benefit from these educational interventions, through which they learn positive strategies for taking charge of these situations themselves, as well as being able to freely express their conflicts in the presence of a third party who is trained for that role. In addition, the student mediators learn to be neutral; they can evaluate the situation empathically and gain internal control over their own attitudes (Adigüzel, 2015).

Notwithstanding, other authors express the effectiveness and success of school mediation based on the number of agreements reached (Bell, Coleman, Anderson, Whelan & Wilder, 2000; Burrell, Zirbel & Allen, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Smith et al., 2002). For example, Turnuklu, Kacmaz, Sunbul and Ergul (2009) describe how, of the 253 school mediations that took place at the school being studied, 94.9% ended with an agreement, while

only 5.1% ended “with no solution”, claiming that these results show the effectiveness of peer mediation. A meta-analysis of peer mediation by Burrell et al. (2003) reported that, in 23 studies with 4327 mediations, 4028 had ended in agreement (93%), claiming that this reveals the success of mediation programs at school, as in the former case. The authors state that the success of peer interventions is in generating agreements that are acceptable to everyone and in developing strategies for similar problems in the future.

Consequently, there is controversy over whether the effectiveness of mediation should be approached from the number of agreements reached, or whether a more educational perspective should be taken, evaluating benefits of mediation in terms of its promotion of socio-affective learning and improved interpersonal relations (García-Raga, Bo & Mondragón, 2018; Ibarrola-García & Iriarte, 2014). Villanueva et al. (2013) remind us that, despite the benefits supplied by peer mediation systems, few studies incorporate a scientific assessment of the impact of these programs (e.g. García-Raga et al., 2016; Ibarrola-García & Iriarte, 2014). For this reason, the aim of this study was to analyze the impact of school mediation on the development of socio-affective learning, in both active mediators and former mediators.

### *Objectives and hypotheses*

The main objective of this study was to analyze student mediators’ perception of the socio-affective learning (emotional, cognitive and moral aspects) that resulted from their participation in a peer mediation program. Additionally, we established the following specific objectives:

(a) To identify variables related to the acquisition of socio-affective learning. Quality of the mediator training process and perceived utility and social validity of mediation were expected to have a positive correlation with student mediators’ self-perception of socio-affective learning.

(b) To analyze differences in socio-affective learning between student mediators according to their status in the mediation program (active or former mediators). In this regard, no differences were expected, and former mediators were expected to retain the socio-affective learning acquired.

(c) To qualitatively analyze the socio-affective learning perceived by former mediators. The results were grouped into three categories: present and future social validity, application in different spheres and perceived socio-affective learning. The former mediators were expected to identify in narration the benefits of their participation in a peer mediation program and how these benefits have persisted over time.

## Method

### *Participants*

The study sample was composed of a large group of mediators (N = 157), including both active mediators (n = 106) and former mediators (n = 51). Of the 157 mediators, 148 had participated in mediation processes. Gender distribution of mediators was 66.2% female and 33.8% male. In addition, most participants were under age 18 (74.8%), and the largest group were in 4th year of compulsory secondary education<sup>1</sup> (24.8%) (Table 1).

The inclusion criterion for participants was to have received at least one training course in school mediation and to be a member or former member of the mediation team at their school. Furthermore, in order to ensure the quality of the mediation service of the participating schools, the condition was established that teaching staff had to have received training in mediation in one of the five preceding school years, whether from the person in charge of mediation at their school, or from an external trainer. After contacting 14 schools in the province of Malaga that met the requirements, 10 schools agreed to participate in the study --7 public schools and 3 private/charter schools.

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<sup>1</sup> T.N. Equivalent to tenth grade.

Table 1. *Descriptive variables of the sample*

	N (%)
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	53 (33.8)
Female	104 (66.2)
<i>Type of school</i>	
Public	115 (73.2)
Private/charter	42 (26.8)
<i>Year in School</i>	
7th grade	17 (10.8)
8th grade	27 (17.2)
9th grade	22 (14.0)
10th grade	39 (24.8)
1st yr. <i>bachillerato</i>	28 (17.8)
2nd yr. <i>bachillerato</i>	11 (7.0)
Alumni	13 (8.3)
<i>Participation</i>	
Active mediators	106 (67.5)
Former mediators	51 (32.5)

Note. *Bachillerato*: university preparatory stage (not compulsory)

### *Instruments*

*School mediation questionnaire for student mediators* (Ibarrola-García & Iriarte, 2012). This instrument focuses mainly on assessing personal competencies that have been developed thanks to participation in school mediation. The questionnaire contains 63 items, which are assessed along the following dimensions: a) identification data, b) training received, c) experience in mediation, d) initial expectations and satisfaction with mediation, e) social validity, and f) perception of socio-affective learning. Perception of socio-affective learning focuses on aspects of emotional learning (such as empathy and patience), cognitive learning (such as objective analysis and consequential thinking), and moral learning (for example, respect and responsibility). The response format was Likert-type with 5 levels (1 = totally disagree; 5 = totally agree). As for reliability, results in the present study sample revealed adequate internal consistency indices, with 0.94 in the dimension of perceived socio-affective learning.

In addition, in order to complement the questionnaire results, former mediators were asked an open question where they could freely explain whether they felt the benefits of mediation were retained over time. The question posed was the following: Do you think that what you learned in mediation is still useful to you, even though you are no longer a mediator? The responses were grouped into three categories: present and future social validity, applicability in different spheres and perceived socio-affective learning.

### *Procedure*

We began by contacting two of the schools with the most recognition and experience in mediation in Malaga province; both of these agreed to collaborate in the study. In order to select the other participating schools, we received assistance from the City of Malaga, whose Area for Education and Youth implements the program *Educating for Life Together*, organizing training courses in peer mediation for students from schools across Malaga city. Through this channel we presented the project to 12 schools, with final study participation from 8 of these.

Once the pertinent permissions were obtained at each participating school, we proceeded to meet with the student mediators. In this regard, after presenting the specific study objectives, each school participated with the mediators that were available; not all the schools were able to contact former mediators because of the difficulty in locating students who no longer attend the school. Overall, we went to each school an average of four times: initial contact to request a meeting, the collaboration proposal, questionnaire application, and collection of questionnaires from students who were not at school the day of the general application. Especially noteworthy was the willingness shown by the schools, that they agreed to participate even though it meant additional work for them, added on to all their efforts outside a normal schedule to carry forward the mediation programs.

### *Data analysis*

Exploratory analyses were carried out to verify the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances or homoscedasticity, to determine whether the necessary requirements were met for reliable application of certain parametric statistical techniques. The Kolmorov-Smirnov test was used to verify the null hypothesis, that distribution of the groups of mediators followed a normal distribution, and Levene's test was used to verify the assumption of

homogeneity of variances. Based on the results obtained in these analyses, we decided on the use of nonparametric statistical techniques.

A number of different statistical procedures were used. First, we carried out a descriptive analysis of the instrument items used. Next, we present a correlations analysis between variables of the mediation process, social validity and the mediators' self-perceived socio-affective learning. In addition, we analyzed differences of means in self-perceived socio-affective learning between active and former mediators, using the *Mann-Whitney U* test. A *Chi-square* test was also carried out to analyze the distribution of the active and former mediators' responses to the statement "I have been learning and improving personally thanks to mediation". Finally, in qualitative terms, we present the former mediators' perception about the usefulness of mediation and the socio-affective learning acquired. Statistical treatment of the data was carried out using SPSS version 22.0.

## Results

In descriptive terms, student mediators' self-perceived socio-affective learning was medium-high. Specifically, the mean scores on the items that make up the dimension of emotional learning are higher than 3.30 (Table 2). Items that obtained the highest scores were empathy ( $M = 4.19$ ), and the ability to recognize one's own emotions ( $M = 3.78$ ) and the emotions of others ( $M = 3.75$ ). By contrast, self-awareness had the lowest score ( $M = 3.31$ ). The mean score for emotional learning was 3.70.

Table 2. *Items on emotional learning*

	<i>M (SD)</i>
As a mediator I find it difficult to identify the emotions of the persons involved in conflict	3.99 (0.95)
Mediation has helped me to better understand others' points of view	4.19 (0.87)
Mediation has helped me to better express my own needs, feelings and emotions to others	3.44 (1.12)
Mediation has helped me to realize what my negative emotions are	3.31 (1.19)
Mediation has helped me to better control my negative emotions	3.39 (1.16)
Mediation has helped me to realize that my emotions influence how I behave	3.78 (0.98)
Mediation has helped me to realize that sometimes there are differences between my values and what I feel and think	3.71 (0.99)
Mediation has helped me to recognize emotions in the gestures, movements and expressions of others	3.75 (0.95)

Mediation has increased my patience when facing problems	3.66 (1.15)
Mediation has helped me to speak out more to others if they have acted unfairly	3.74 (0.99)
Mediation has helped me to communicate better with others	3.72 (1.20)

Regarding cognitive learning, all items obtained mean scores higher than 3.40, with the highest values going to neutrality and alternative thinking ( $M = 3.95$ ), and the lowest value to use of communication techniques ( $M = 3.42$ ). The mean for cognitive learning was 3.74 (Table 3).

Table 3. *Items on cognitive learning*

	<i>M (SD)</i>
I used to see conflict as something negative and now I see it as an opportunity to learn	3.55 (1.13)
I have learned to analyze conflicts without being carried away by my personal opinion	3.95 (0.99)
I stop to think more about the possible consequences of not acting right	3.78 (1.13)
In a conflict, I stop to think more about different ways to resolve it	3.95 (0.90)
I stop to think more about whether my behavior has really achieved what I was after	3.80 (0.94)
I frequently use communication techniques in my daily life	3.42 (1.22)

Finally, moral learning seems to be the dimension where the participants had the greatest perception of learning, with the importance of knowing how to ask for help receiving the highest rating ( $M = 4.00$ ). The mean for all values obtained in moral learning was 3.87 (Table 4).

Table 4. *Items on moral learning*

	<i>M (SD)</i>
Mediation has made me realize the responsibility that I have for solving my own conflicts	3.94 (1.05)
I am more respectful and more accepting of differences in people I relate with	3.89 (0.98)
I feel more involved in the daily life of my school, and especially in situations where I can participate	3.59 (1.16)
I feel that mediation has helped me to better understand what is just and what is unjust	3.99 (1.02)
Since I have been a mediator, I consider it more important to not speak badly of people when they are not present	3.83 (1.06)

I give more importance now to what each person can do towards building positive coexistence	3.88 (0.94)
Now I give more value to the importance of knowing how to ask for help when it's needed	4.00 (0.98)

In addition, we analyzed the different factors of the process and the social validity of mediation, and their relation to the student mediators' self-perceived socio-affective learning (Table 5). Regarding the mediation process, a relationship was found with the number of mediations in which they had participated as a mediator (emotional learning,  $r = .34$ ), as well as with considering that their initial training was adequate, and with having follow-up meetings after the mediation process.

Another factor that was significantly related to socio-affective learning was the social validity of mediation (having a place to go for help, solving serious conflicts and building positive coexistence). In this line, a positive correlation was found between socio-affective learning and perceiving that one has something to contribute, whether because their peers trusted them for solving their conflicts or because they had a commission to fulfill (Table 5). Moreover, the idea that students can collaborate among themselves to solve their conflicts fairly and be able to help their peers solve their conflicts is related to greater learning in the three areas. However, the consideration that one advantage of being a mediator was getting out of class time showed a negative relationship to socio-affective learning. By contrast, the consideration that they were better able to solve their peers' conflicts than adults, because they connect more with their peers, was related to greater learning in the three areas. Correlations were likewise found between socio-affective learning and considering that learning about mediation was useful to them in other life situations (Table 5).

Table 5. Variables related to the perception of socio-affective learning

	Emotional learning	Cognitive learning	Moral learning
<i>Mediation process</i>			
Mediations in which he/she participated	<b>.34</b>	.24	.24
Adequate initial training	.21	.17	.22
Follow-up meeting after the process	.21	.18	.25
<i>Social validity</i>			
Serves to reduce sanctions	.25	.25	<b>.30</b>

Serves to have a place to go for help	<b>.53</b>	<b>.46</b>	<b>.63</b>
Serves for solving serious conflicts	.22	.29	<b>.41</b>
Serves for positive coexistence	<b>.34</b>	<b>.34</b>	<b>.49</b>
Classmates' trust for solving conflicts	.26	.21	<b>.37</b>
Having a commission to fulfill	.29	.29	<b>.34</b>
One advantage is getting out of class time	-.19	-.23	-.25
Resolving their conflicts fairly	.25	.28	<b>.40</b>
Helping peers with their conflicts	<b>.41</b>	<b>.44</b>	<b>.52</b>
We connect better with our peers	.23	.23	<b>.30</b>
Lets us collaborate with some of the teachers	.19	.25	.25
Useful to me in other life situations	<b>.55</b>	<b>.48</b>	<b>.63</b>

*Note.* All correlation coefficients are significant at  $p < .05$ .

Self-perceived socio-affective learning was also analyzed as a function of current or past participation in the mediation service. Through descriptive analysis, we observed that after students left mediation, their perceived learning was maintained at similar values as those of the active mediators (Table 6). In order to analyze differences of means, the *Mann-Whitney U* was applied; no significant differences were observed between the active mediators and the former mediators in any of the specific learnings assessed.

Table 6. *Differences of means in socio-affective learning perceived by the student mediators, according to their status in the mediation program*

	Active Mediators (n = 106)	Former Mediators (n = 51)	<i>Mann- Whitney U</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Emotional Lrng	3.65	3.66	2778.00	0.38	.704
Cognitive Lrng	3.73	3.65	2642.00	-0.23	.819
Moral Learning	3.94	3.71	2434.50	-1.01	.313

To conclude our analysis of results on differences between active and former mediators, we must consider the item: "I have been learning and improving personally thanks to mediation". The Chi-square test was carried out to find the response distribution in the group of active and former mediators. The results indicated differences in the response distribution,

$\chi^2 (4) = 10.35, p = .03$ , where the group of former mediators presented a higher distribution than what was expected.

To complement the statistical results, an open question was also formulated when the information was collected; this question focused on whether the learning acquired from peer mediation persisted over time. The question posed to the former mediators was the following: Do you think that what you learned in mediation is still useful to you, even though you are no longer a mediator? Once the responses were transcribed, they were grouped into different categories. Table 7 presents fragments of some of the responses obtained regarding the present and future utility of mediation, its application to different spheres of life and the perception of socio-affective learning.

Table 7. *Examples of former mediators' perception of social validity and their acquisition of socio-affective learning*

<i>Present and future utility</i>	I think that what you learn in mediation you don't forget, and even though I have left mediation, I continue putting into practice some of the things I learned.
	What you learn in mediation, I haven't forgotten, what's more, I use it almost every day and it's useful to me, and very much so.
	Yes, I feel that it's still there, even though I am not acting as a mediator.
<i>Application in different spheres</i>	Mediation is going to be useful and beneficial to me my whole life, as well as being able to cope with problems at home or in other places outside school.
	Yes, because everything I have learned in these years of mediation, I continue to carry out in my school life and private life.
	Of course, I can affirm that it is useful both for my personal life and for the outside world, it's something you learn and that sticks with you forever.
<i>Perception of socio-affective learning</i>	You learn a lot of things in mediation, and one of them is to put yourself in the other person's place, and in daily life this is very important.
	I continue to practice some things I learned, like listening to others and trying to solve my problems by talking and taking things more calmly.
	Now I am able to think before I act, and to position myself in the place of others and so correct myself.

	Now I am more just, and when I have a conflict I stop and listen to the other individual.
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### Discussion and Conclusions

School mediation is an educational measure whose aim is conflict resolution, prevention of bullying situations and personal development. The objective of the present study was to focus only on this last aspect, that is, understanding and analyzing the socio-affective learning (emotional, cognitive and moral) that is developed in the student mediators through mediation. Assessment of the impact of peer mediation is a matter of great importance, so that there may be evidence that justifies and promotes implementation of these programs at school.

Regarding emotional learning, the highest scores were obtained in empathy and in the capacity to recognize one's own emotions and those of others. This result concurs with the Spanish study by Ibarrola-García and Iriarte (2014) and with international studies (Burrell et al., 2003; Cassinerio & Lane-Garon, 2006; Lane-Garon & Richardson, 2003; Şahin, Serin & Serin, 2011; Selfridge, 2004; Turnuklu, Kaçmaz, Gürler et al., 2009). During the mediation process, student mediators must identify the thoughts and emotions of the persons in conflict, and this leads them to better understand others' point of view (Ibarrola-García & Iriarte, 2014; Ibarrola-García, Iriarte & Aznárez-Sanado, 2017). In fact, mediators receive specific training for this purpose, so it is natural that they put it in practice and therefore increase this competency (Funes, 2000).

Regarding cognitive learning, the results of the present study also concur with the results obtained by Ibarrola-García and Iriarte (2014), in that the types of learning with the highest scores were neutrality and alternative thinking. Consequently, both studies emphasize that mediators have learned to analyze conflicts objectively, without being caught up in their personal opinion, and to think of different pathways for resolving conflicts. These results confirm other studies in supporting the claim that when mediators learn the phases of mediation, it includes learning a schema that requires them to practice neutrality and alternative thinking (Adigüzel, 2015; Bickmore, 2002; Long, Fabricius, Musheno & Palumbo, 1998; Stevahn, 2004).

Finally, regarding moral learning, the most highly ranked item was the importance of knowing how to ask for help. Similar results were obtained by Ibarrola-García and Iriarte (2014). These authors argue that mediators, in being able to help the mediated parties and guide them towards finding new channels of resolution, they themselves realize the benefits that can come from asking others for help. In the same way, the present study finds two other aspects to be highly valued by participants: justice and personal responsibility. This means that students consider mediation to have helped them better understand what is just and what is unjust and to realize the responsibility they have for solving their own conflicts. Mediation allows student mediators to become aware of the relational problems in their class, motivating them to keep acquiring knowledge for understanding conflicts and for managing them from a positive perspective (Sánchez-García-Arista, 2018).

Turning now to factors of the mediation process that correlate with socio-affective learning, a positive relationship was found with the number of mediations in which one had participated as a mediator. The more mediations carried out, the greater the perception of socio-affective learning. Although the mere fact of receiving training has been demonstrated to be beneficial for students (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Ortega & del Rey, 2006), these benefits increase with practice. Consequently, given that practice may be an important factor in acquisition of socio-affective learning (Sánchez-Cánovas, 2013), all schools with a mediation service should make it a priority for every trained student to be able to participate in at least one process. The fact that not all trained students get to participate in a process, or at least, not until much time has passed after their training, may be explained by a lack of conflicts that can be mediated. For this reason, it is important to inform and raise awareness in the whole school community, so that educational tools that promote positive coexistence, such as mediation, become known and used. The school administration must support its implementation, but equally important or more so is support from the rest of the faculty in making the service known, and hence, enable the service to be maintained. For this reason, not only should students be trained and informed, but also the teaching staff, so that student mediators can offer a service that copes positively with conflict and whose effectiveness for improved coexistence and for students' personal improvement is increasingly supported by data (Cassinero & Lane-Garon, 2006; García-Raga et al., 2016, 2018, García-Raga, Boqué & Grau, 2019; Ibarrola-García & Iriarte, 2013; Mas & Torrego, 2014; Villanueva et al., 2013). Likewise, we cannot overlook the fundamental role of families. The implementation of alternative measures for

conflict resolution, such as mediation, based on an educational and transformational process, requires the involvement of the whole educational community: students, teachers and families (Sánchez-García-Arista, 2018).

Also highly important, due to its relationship to socio-affective learning, is holding follow-up meetings between the student mediators and the teachers responsible for the mediation service. Putting into practice the skills acquired without a reflection process afterward could result in improper use of the techniques, or even frustration on the part of the mediators due to lack of adequate feedback about their performance.

On the other hand, perception of the social validity of school mediation was also positively related to the student mediators' socio-affective learning. The peer mediators considered that they were able to connect better with their classmates and that they could detect conflicts before the adults did. Adigüzel (2015) indicated that this perception fosters an empathic evaluation of conflicts in school mediators. Moreover, a positive relationship was observed between perceived utility of mediation outside the school context, and identification of socio-affective learning. This result corroborates several authors' hypotheses that defend the usefulness of learning gained from mediation outside the school context (García-Raga et al., 2016; García-Raga & Crespo-Ginés, 2012; Viana-Orta, 2013; Viana-Orta & López, 2015).

Finally, as a novel contribution from this research, results were obtained regarding socio-affective learning in active and former mediators. The results show that regardless of whether mediators were currently participating in mediation, high scores were obtained in the three areas of learning assessed. We can therefore conclude that, in this specific study, the former mediators continued to perceive that their participation in a peer mediation service fostered certain socio-affective learning. Other authors also defend that mediation persists over time (García-Raga et al., 2016), although we have not found empirical studies in this regard. Next, we observe that the former mediators were able to better identify the learning they had acquired through mediation. In other words, former mediators had a better ability to identify the specific benefits they had gained from school mediation and that still persisted.

We also mention the qualitative information provided by the former mediators about their perception of learning acquired through school mediation, where they focus on the present and future utility of mediation, its application to different spheres of life, and on socio-

affective learning. The former mediators considered that the benefits of mediation persist and that they have not forgotten the learning they acquired; they confirmed that what they learned persists over time, thereby overruling what Sánchez-García-Arista (2018) claimed to be a weakness commonly attributed to mediation. Considering the types of socio-affective learning that the former mediators identify, we note that empathy was one of the principal learnings. They likewise reported having internalized active listening, communication, patience, self-control and justice, among others, and add that they continue to use communication techniques that they learned in mediation.

With school mediation, therefore, we are training not only for the short- and mid-term, but also in a prolonged manner over time. Student mediators report that, though they have left mediation, they continue to regularly practice certain aspects of the learning they acquired. As for application of learning to other spheres, several authors stress the importance of students acquiring tools for constructive conflict management that they can use in other contexts (García-Raga et al., 2016; Sánchez-García-Arista, 2014). However, we find no studies that confirm this hypothesis. In the present study, the former mediators expressed that mediation was useful to them for coping with problems at home, with family members, friends, and in other situations of daily life.

In conclusion, mediation is a tool that not only serves to solve conflicts but can also promote socio-emotional learning in student mediators. Consequently, there are more and more authors that consider school mediation from a educational and transformational perspective, given that, besides contributing to conflict resolution, it contributes to students' personal development (García-Raga et al., 2016, 2018; Iriarte & Ibarrola-García, 2018; Pérez de Guzmán, 2008; Sánchez-Cánovas, 2013; Viana-Orta, 2013).

One of the main strengths of the present study is the number of mediators that have participated, since this specific population is difficult to reach, and there are few studies that deal with this population in comparison to others. Another important aspect was the inclusion of not only active mediators, but also former mediators who in many cases had left the school several years ago. On the other hand, while the participation of former mediators is a novel contribution, there is room to continue working in this line through future studies, to be done on a larger scale, and using other instruments and measures that complement the questionnaire used here. It would also be appropriate to carry out longitudinal studies with a control

group; this would allow us to learn, in a single group of persons, how learnings evolve as they are being acquired, and if they are maintained after students leave school.

This study has been able to gather information on the benefits of school mediation in terms of student mediators acquiring socio-affective learning, not only during the time that they are enrolled in the school, but also after leaving school. The results presented here may have implications for the development and implementation of peer mediation programs, since they can provide an incentive to schools to continue developing measures for improved coexistence, prevention of bullying and social exclusion, and the promotion of socio-emotional learning among their students.

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