

Peer teaching as a strategy for conflict management and student re-engagement in schools

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PEER TEACHING AS A STRATEGY FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

AND STUDENT RE-ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This article reports on a major action research program that experimented with the use of cross – age peer teaching in schools to assist teachers to manage conflict issues in their classrooms, and to reengage disaffected students in learning. The research, which was conducted in a range of elementary and secondary schools in Australia, was part of a larger international project using conflict resolution concepts and techniques combined with drama strategies to address cultural conflict in schools. The use of formal cross-age peer teaching emerged as a highly effective strategy in teaching students to manage a range of conflicts in schools, and especially in learning to deal with bullying. Operating as peer teachers also enabled a number of students in the study with serious behaviour problems to re-engage with their learning. The article therefore evaluates the effectiveness of peer teaching in both conflict management and student re-engagement.

Key Words: peer teaching, conflict and bullying management, student re-engagement in learning, action research

Introduction

The power of peer teaching to address serious behavioural problems in schools, and re-engage disaffected learners, emerged as a major outcome of ten years of action research into conflict and bullying in schools. The project began as

collaboration with the international DRACON research program, with projects in Australia, Sweden and Malaysia. Established by conflict resolution academics at the Peace and Development Institute at Gothenburg University in Sweden, the DRACON program was originally focused on the use of drama in schools in a range of different cultures with the aim of resolving cultural conflict. As the projects developed in different countries, a range of concepts, techniques, and approaches were trialled, and the focus shifted from cultural conflict to all forms of conflict, including bullying (Lofgren & Malm, 2005)).

In the second of the ten years of the DRACON project, peer teaching was introduced by the Australian researchers as an experiment in enhancing both motivation and learning. The first trial was so successful peer teaching became an integral part of the research plan and was adopted by the Swedish researchers as central to their methodology. In the final phase of the Australian research, cross-age peer teaching was used to address bullying specifically. Throughout the DRACON project the research produced consistent confirmatory evidence that peer teaching generates genuine understanding in learners, and then as peer teachers empowers them to deal with cultural and other conflicts(O'Toole, Burton & Plunkett , 2005) .

An unanticipated outcome of the use of peer teaching was the re-engagement in their education of a number of disaffected students who participated in the action research. Functioning as peer teachers appeared to increase the self – esteem, motivation and competence of these students, re-igniting their interest in learning

and commitment to their education. This outcome remained a consistent thread throughout the life of the research.

Peer Teaching and Student Learning

Extensive research over the past two decades has identified peer teaching as a particularly potent approach to stimulating learning in schools. (Goodlad & Hirst, 1989, Billson and Tiberius, 1991, Simmons et al, 1995, Rubin and Herbert, 1998, , Boud et al, 2001, Gordon 2005). These studies have found clear and convincing proof that having students teach, individually tutor or academically mentor each other can be an extremely effective tool for improving learning in the classroom.

Goodlad and Hirst (1989) identify the positive impact that peer teaching has on student self – esteem, particularly for the students acting as teachers. The range of specific benefits for students doing the peer teaching are described by Rubin and Herbert (1998) as: an increase in social and intellectual awareness; significant gains in empathy; the clear recognition that students could change habitual patterns of behaviour; and finally, that peer teaching empowers students, increasing their sense of mastery and self-esteem. They conclude that it would be hard to think of another method that would enable so much intellectual, social and personal growth.

Other research has focused on the effects of peer teaching on the students being taught. Falchikov (2001 p.153)) quotes studies that showed peer learners had higher test scores than students who studied alone, that there was an increase in positive attitudes to their learning and completion rates 64% higher in comparison to traditionally taught students. McKeachie et al. (1998 p.2) claim that this form of

learning is superior in “..application of concepts, problem solving, attitude, motivation, group membership and leadership skills”. Furthermore, research also indicates that “..having been helped by older children acting as tutors, the younger children started to adopt a helping relationship towards other people- a sort of transfer of tutor role to the tutees who extended this role to their peers.”(Goodlad and Hirst (1989 p. 39). Overall, the research in the field has produced extensive evidence that teenagers often learn more effectively from their peers, particularly older peers, than from traditional, teacher - centred instruction, and O'Donnell and King (1999 p.313) conclude that “..peer learning situations can effectively support student learning and much is known about how to promote such learning in groups.”

Furthermore, research on the use of peer teaching to re-engage negative leaders in secondary schools in the United Kingdom (Morrison 2004, Morrison, Burton and O'Toole, 2006) demonstrates that it has the power to transform the behaviors and attitudes of students with serious behavioral problems who have a high status amongst their peers. Not only do these students re-engage in the schooling process, but their peer teaching experiences appear to re-orient them towards positive leadership roles. This research was confirmed by the DRACON project, where individual cases of significant positive changes of behaviour were recorded amongst problem and disaffected students involved in the project (O'Toole, Burton and Plunkett, 2005).

The potential benefits for both the peer teachers and peer learners at all levels of schooling are therefore considerable. Reviewing the outcomes of a number of case

studies in peer teaching in the United States of America, (Gordon 2005 p.73) concludes "...Many elementary, high school and college students improved their basic skills, achievement ability, meta-cognitive skills, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation regarding schooling, learning, and sometimes life itself."

Despite this evidence that peer teaching is extremely effective in both enhancing learning and empowering students, it has been a neglected resource in the management of conflict and bullying in schools and student disengagement from formal learning. There is no evidence in the current literature internationally that systematic cross-age peer teaching has been empirically tested as a mechanism to address bullying or conflict in schools outside the study that is the focus of this article.

The Impact of Conflict and Bullying on Student Learning and Development

Conflict is an inherent part of human life and society, and it can be a major issue in schools where it is characterized by clashes between groups with conflicting rights, powers and interests – teachers and students, students from different socio – economic, cultural or ethnic backgrounds, students of different ages and different genders. The nature of schools means that conflict between individuals or different groups, especially when this conflict involves imbalances of power and systematic bullying, can escalate rapidly and have a major impact on teaching and learning in individual classrooms and throughout the whole school.

In fact, bullying is a major and intractable problem in schools world-wide. Extensive research over the past 20 years has consistently identified the impact of bullying

on children's learning, social development and self-image. The research indicates that despite attempts in individual schools, at the system level and nationally and internationally to counter bullying, it continues to be one of the major issues faced by students and teachers. (Rigby 2002, Sullivan et al, 2004, Roberts 2006)

The action research project focused on the nature of bullying as a misuse of power by individuals or groups causing injury, fear, humiliation or suffering to others less powerful (Rigby 2002). The main forms of bullying explored through the peer teaching and drama were physical, verbal, social and psychological and, in the later research phases, cyber bullying. Over the ten years of the project there was a significant increase in the incidence of covert and cyber bullying identified by the students, and these forms of bullying became an important focus of the research.

Surveys conducted in the UK, Europe, Canada, Australia and NZ indicate that in excess of 20% of all students have been involved in bullying as either bully or victim (Tatum and Tatum 1996), whilst Rigby's (2002) meta evaluation of bullying indicates that one child in six is bullied on a weekly basis.) A recent analysis of major nationwide studies of bullying behaviour in the United States of America reveals that the majority of students surveyed regarded bullying as a serious problem in their schools, and almost 30% stated they had been involved in bullying. (Roberts 2006: p. 4-5). A British Council Survey (Roman 2008) revealed that 46% of UK school children were seriously concerned about bullying, and the most recent report on bullying in Australia, commissioned in 2009 by the federal government, found that: "1 in 4 children from Year 4 to Year 9 say they are bullied

every few weeks...and half of all students in Year 9 are both bullied and bully others” (McDougall and Chilcott, 2009 p.2)

In their survey of the literature, Sullivan et al (2004p.21) identify the effects of bullying on the victims as causing lower self esteem, depression, anxiety, fearfulness and introversion. and there are links between bullying and psychosomatic symptoms and psychiatric referral. Victims are more likely to become disengaged from their learning and drop out of school, and those involved in bullying show the highest risk of suicide ideation. Furthermore, suicide is a causal factor in actual suicide in a number of cases in a range of countries each year (Rigby 2002, Sullivan et al, 2004)

The causes and consequences of being a bully have also been extensively researched. (Roberts 2006 p.p. 59 - 60). During their schooling bullies are more likely to be disengaged and exhibit problem behaviour, have juvenile records and achieve poorly in their studies, and these behaviours remain remarkable constant. As adults, school bullies are more likely to have been convicted of a serious crime and of drug taking, and are more likely to be abusive of their spouses. They are less likely than their peers to have achieved success academically, professionally or socially. Perhaps most significant of all, they are more likely to have children who are bullies.

The Structure of the Peer Teaching Research Study

Action research was the chosen methodology because of its specific purpose of investigating existing practices ,especially in education, and then implementing

new practices and evaluating the results, leading to improvements that benefit both students and teachers (Carr and Kemmis, 1986)

The action research was conducted in more than one hundred schools in two different states of Australia over a period of ten years in collaboration with the education departments in each state. In the early phases of the research, the use of peer teaching in partnership with role enactment and dramatic improvisation strategies was employed to investigate a range of conflicts – personal, peer, family, cultural and educational. The combination of these strategies proved highly effective, and the process was continuously enhanced with each action phase. In the final three years of the research, bullying became the central focus of the project. The program that evolved used a whole school approach to managing conflict or bullying, integrated within the normal curriculum, and the peer teaching was the vehicle for transmitting the program throughout a secondary school and then to neighbourhood elementary schools.

In each secondary school, senior classes of students, either Year 11 or Year 10, were formally taught fundamental concepts relating to the general nature of conflict, and in later action research phases learned specifically about bullying. The students in these classes then explored and enhanced their understanding of conflict or bullying through developing and acting out a range of scenarios, real and fictional, using a variety of role and improvisation strategies. This use of role and enactment allowed the students to investigate experiences and consequences of conflict or bullying in a safe, fictional context. Falchikov (2001) argues that the use of role is one of the most valuable techniques in training peer teachers, and

notes that a number of peer tutor training schemes make use of role strategies. She also endorses modelling where more experienced peer teachers model effective teaching for new peer teachers. Gordon (2005) identifies the success of both role and modelling in a number of different peer training program case studies.

The Central Drama Strategy

Once the senior secondary students had a clear understanding of the causes and consequences of conflict or bullying, they constructed pieces of theatre depicting the development of a conflict or bullying situation. These theatrical representations used Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre technique (Boal 1979, 1995), a form of participatory theatre extensively applied throughout the developing world in Theatre for Development. Forum Theatre is specifically constructed to allow members of the audience to intervene in a performance and take on a role to experiment with changing the situation being depicted. The students' application of Forum Theatre was enhanced with further in-role and process drama techniques that allowed them to explore the conflict and bullying situations they were dramatising more fully.

The Peer Teaching

These groups of senior students then visited classes of younger students in their schools, using small group teaching and workshop techniques to teach these younger classes a basic understanding of conflict or bullying, and using role and improvisation to explore real and fictional situations. The use of small group teaching was essential to the structure of the program because group work

involves cooperation, sharing and negotiation, empowering both the peer teachers and the peer learners. . Furthermore, the teachers were able to step outside their normal function as transmitters of knowledge to act as facilitators of a student centred learning approach. Boud et al (2001 p.44) argue that this approach leads to a greater understanding of subject matter and more effective planning. Furthermore, research indicates that workshops are fundamental to peer teaching and help the peer teachers and learners discover new techniques to improve learning. (Falchikov 2001 p.144)

The training of the student peer teachers at each level was the responsibility of the classroom teachers in the curriculum subjects that were chosen as appropriate for the implementation the project. As a result, some students received intensive and effective support in planning and implementing their peer teaching, and were able to trial their teaching within their own classes, learning from each other. The majority of classes were given some assistance with their peer teaching, and felt at least adequately prepared, but a significant number of students received little or no guidance at all, and found the peer teaching a difficult challenge. Despite this variation in peer teacher training, all the students involved in peer teaching throughout the project indicated on the questionnaires and in interviews that they had enjoyed the experience and found it valuable in learning about and dealing with bullying.

Forum Theatre Performance

The final phase of the peer teaching involved the performance of the prepared Forum Theatre plays. The peer teachers invited the younger students to intervene

to de-escalate the conflict or bullying. Although the younger students were seldom able to solve the problem being depicted, the intense debate and further exploration of the scenario consistently produced reflective discussion and analysis by both the peer teachers and peer learners.

The younger peer learners in turn prepared their teaching and Forum Theatre presentations in groups, with the assistance of their classroom teachers and often their older peer teachers, and taught classes of younger students, either in their own school or in neighbourhood primary schools. In some primary schools the peer teaching actually flowed down to the youngest grades in the school. The data gathered over the ten years of the research project consistently indicates that the most effective and persistent learning and change in behaviour occur when students had been both peer learners and peer teachers in the process.

Data Collection

The students, school administrators and teachers involved in the study completed pre – and post questionnaires, and both individual and group summative interviews were conducted with selected students, teachers and administrators. The data analysed in this study was the product of individual student questionnaires, applied both before and after involvement in the research project, interviews with all teachers involved in the research, and selected students from each age group in each school. The program is on-going in a number of schools and follow – up studies are being conducted in these schools.

Outcomes of Peer Teaching for the Students

1. Learning to manage conflict Issues

The results from the data of the project show that the peer teaching benefited both the younger and the older students. Firstly, the older students appeared more confident in their understanding of conflict or bullying and their ability to deal with it once they were placed in the role of having to teach the younger students. By experiencing this cross-age peer teaching more than once, they were able to refine their skills and confidence in peer teaching and to demonstrate increasing mastery of conflict and bullying management. The younger students acting as peer learners were motivated and excited by the experience of being taught by older peers and this appeared to enhance their understanding of conflict and their sense of competence in dealing with bullying situations. These positive outcomes were confirmed by both the questionnaire data and the interviews.

The students involved in the project demonstrated a positive attitude toward conflict management after being involved in the peer teaching as teachers and learners. When asked, “Do you think that conflict can be prevented, de-escalated or stopped?” 96.3% of students responded yes and only 3.7% responded no. Asked if they were more likely to do something in response to a conflict situation in order to de-escalate or end it, 77.8% responded yes, 14.8% responded no and 7.4% felt unsure. Asked if they felt they could now manage conflict situations better, 80% of students said yes, 13.3% said ‘no’ and 6.7% said they were ‘unsure.’

These positive responses to the project by the students were confirmed by the teachers, particularly in regard to bullying in their schools. When asked if they had observed any changes in students who were known to have been involved in

bullying situations as either bullies, bullied or bystanders, 71.4% of teachers replied yes. Half of these teacher respondents identified a general increase in awareness amongst their students of bullying as a serious form of conflict that can cause harm. The other 50% described identifiable improvements in the ability of their students to handle bullying situations

2. Increased motivation and learning competence

Individual students and teachers articulated the learning generated by the peer teaching both for the peer teachers and the learners. One year 11 student was able to encapsulate the aims and processes of the research:

It makes you feel good and gives you self esteem and you get more confidence while you're doing it, and the more you do it the better you know about it and you get more experience and as you get more experience you can use that and pass it on to younger people, and then they'll start learning and they'll pass it on. It is like a snowball effect and will keep going on.

A senior high school teacher recognised the power of the peer teaching to generate learning in the students in his Year 11 class.

As a teacher I saw where the peer teaching happens was just brilliant.

The kids do it all and that's where they learn. It's not when I teach them – it's when they have to teach and that's the beauty of it.

A number of older students commented on the fact that they believed they could make a difference to the occurrence and consequences of conflict and bullying in

their schools as a result of peer teaching students from the neighbourhood elementary school:

I really like the fact that we can teach them-and even though there may be a teacher there, the students were more relaxed and more willing to open up and stuff like that.... I just liked the fact that we could really make a change even though we're just students- that we could go out there and make a change for the next students coming into the High School. (Year 9 student)

Teachers from both the high schools and elementary schools observed that during peer teaching, the younger students were excited about the prospect of having the older students in their classes teaching them. One teacher observed:

I really liked the peer teaching components. It particularly works well with the younger kids – like primary kids get a real kick out of having high school kids take over

Some of the peer teachers also noted that the younger students responded enthusiastically to being taught by their older peers.

The peer teaching, I think, was a great aspect of it. I mean I think a lot of the kids related a lot more towards students teaching classes other than the teachers. It wasn't just teachers rattling of facts again." (Year 10 Student)

3. Cross – age mentoring networks

An informal but significant cross – age mentoring network appeared to emerge from the peer teaching in all the case study schools. Students who would not

normally interact with each other due to their different ages worked together in the research project and started acknowledging and interacting with each other outside the classroom.

One primary teacher identified this positive long – term impact of the peer teaching by high school students on her elementary class, most of whom went on to attend the high school.

With the peer teaching, it did give a foothold in the high school as they're going over there- they can identify someone that they worked with in the program ,it may be a buddy or whatever else and, peer teaching, it gives responsibility to the high school students; it gives responsibility to the primary schools too. (Primary teacher)

A high school teacher identified the same process occurring amongst students of different ages within his school:

Using the peer teaching-those relationships are out there still – that interaction between the different year levels in this environment works. By using the bullying and conflict situations, those kids see each other around. While they may not interact, the knowledge is there that they know one another; that they know they have that common link.

4. Reengagement and leadership

The improved self-esteem and positive peer relations that occurred as a result of this peer teaching project are significant. Students appeared to achieve a certain amount of social development as a result of peer teaching. Maskell (2002 : 107)

found that “in many evaluative studies it has been seen that their personal development is accelerated. They say that one of their greatest rewards is that of working alongside adults in an equal and responsible relationship.” This is confirmed by a Year Eleven teacher in one high school, particularly in relation to students who had not demonstrated leadership or maturity before.

The change that I have probably noticed the most is how well they have stepped into a leadership role, doing their mentoring, their peer teaching. . I have been very impressed by the way a number of them have just stepped into taking over that leadership role. That’s from the Year 11 point of view. A lot of the students who have been involved in this project have generally been those who have not participated in this sort of thing before and that’s absolutely delighted me to see how some of them have grown.

Other students who were regarded by their schools as serious behavioural problems showed significant changes as a result of being peer teachers. This data confirmed the transformational changes observed by Morrison (2004, 2006) in the UK and O’Toole, Burton & Plunkett (2005) in Australia in individual students involved in peer teaching.

One teacher remarked during interviews that once her students became the peer teachers, she really saw the benefits of empowering them by giving them responsibility and meaningful tasks. The students who had normally been classified as troublesome became both positive leaders and effective teachers when given the chance. Another teacher involved in the project observed that male

students in particular who had been classified as troublesome in her class became effective and motivated peer teachers :

But what really worked well was when my class became the key class for the younger grades and they actually really surprised me. I thought, I wonder how this is going to go and I just had to let them sink or swim and they were really good – real troublesome boys in the class took over, and they were getting up in explaining things and instructing or the kids. (Year 9 Teacher)

Another Year nine teacher noted a particularly significant change in one adolescent boy's attitudes and behaviour when he became a peer teacher.

I can think of one particular student who actually has really benefited from this and he was a student who interacted a lot with the school behaviour management focus – the program. He was often on suspension, things like that. And I noticed especially when we went to the primary school that he was a bit of a role model.. I think something happened to him because of his involvement in this (program). The fact that he had younger kids looking up to him – I noticed him being quite different in that context than he had ever been at school.

The project provided this particular student, identified by the teacher as having behavioural problems, with the opportunity to behave at school in a positive way, taking on a leadership role. As Rubin and Herbert (1998) note, one of the major outcomes of peer teaching is evidence that

students who function effectively as peer teaching develop the capacity to change habitual patterns of behaviour;

Outcomes for the Teachers

In terms of managing student conflict in their schools, and particularly bullying, 85.7% of the teachers involved in the project indicated that they felt more confident in dealing with both their own classes and with other students in the school and, 71.5% of these teachers agreed that their involvement in the project was a valuable use of their time, while further 14.2% were undecided.

Individual teachers also identified wider and more significant impacts on their pedagogy and their relationships with their students. A number of classroom teachers found that in the process of training their students to be peer teachers, they were not only able to consciously identify and analyse their own teaching techniques, but were able to reflect on the real effectiveness of their teaching. By acting as facilitators of the peer teaching process, rather than instructors, teachers also had the opportunity to redefine their relationships with their students. This indicates that teachers as well as students benefit from the collaborative group teaching process that occurs as a result of peer teaching. One senior secondary high school teacher experienced both these benefits.

I actually saw a lot of my bad habits coming out in my kids, so they reflect how I teach, so that's really a good learning tool for me – to see what I was doing wrong and where I've been wrong. And it's really empowering for me to be able to say to the kids "It's all yours and you've done that" – and it's not me doing it, or leading them, it's them

doing it on their own bat. I've helped them, I'll guide them, but it's empowering for the students and that empowers our relationship and in the classroom that's a positive thing. (Year 11 teacher)

Another high school teacher felt that her relationship with her students as learners and as individuals had been enhanced by her involvement in the research study. She stated that she had become more proficient at:

Understanding where the students are coming from, meeting what their needs are, perhaps treating them differently depending upon where they are coming from – social justice- and giving them time to be heard, because unfortunately we are so busy.

An elementary school teacher whose class received peer teaching from the local high school students also identified a number of benefits of both peer teaching and group work for her own teaching.

As a teacher, it was very beneficial for me to have my children working as a group. I felt that their interaction was very useful with the high school students. They got to take control of the teaching situation with the high school students which I thought benefited them, and the primary students were not as intimidated because of the situation. For me as a teacher it was really good to see that the kids could work together, and I was able to use some of that later on with them.

Constraints

Gordon (2005) points out that a number of studies conducted on the failure of specific peer tutoring programs to achieve gains found the same problems

- .lack of time for the peer tutoring
- insufficient training for the peer teachers
- inadequate initial preparation of the curriculum teaching and materials

Lack of time and training both emerged as significant constraints on the peer teaching in the Acting against Bullying project. The curriculum and teaching materials were already available to the schools involved in the project, so this was less problematic. However, a further constraint that was also encountered in a number of schools was lack of support from the school administration for the peer teaching.

Lack of Time

In their interviews, a significant number of students identified lack of time for the preparation and peer teaching as an obstacle to learning, both for them and for the peer learners they were teaching. When asked what improvements could be made to the program, students responded:

A bit more time when we're working with the kids and before so we can plan it.

I reckon we could be given more time so that the children can understand a bit more

On the summative questionnaire, 14.3% of teachers responded that more time would have been beneficial. Some teachers also made specific observations about a lack of time and the constraints this imposed on the peer teaching:

I think time was against us. We only did two sessions. I think we tried to rush too much in the time allocation.

What could have been done better was that Year 11 students could have gone into their peer teaching classes more but it just would have been impossible time – wise.

Lack of Training in Peer Teaching

During the life of the project it became increasingly evident that all students required assistance with basic teaching strategies before they peer taught younger students. Although this had not been initially a feature of the program, it became evident that teachers needed to ensure that their students were familiar with specific teaching strategies and behaviour management techniques before they went out to peer-teach the younger students.

After the first iteration of the peer teaching in his high school, one senior teacher observed:

While I don't think it's important that we teach them how to teach, personally I think it better to give them a few little hints before they go into the class and it is probably something I would do next time is teach the kids a little bit, just very, very basic structures around teaching, focus, the class and that type of thing – which they should pick up from me and my style.

Another high school teacher whose Year 9 class was taught by older students also commented on the need for some training for the peer teachers:

It didn't work so well with the Year 9s working with the Year 12s and I think that's because perhaps some of the Year 12s could have been a little more confident or authoritative with them – at times ... I had to step in, and my kids, Year 9s, they were a bit daunted by them to start with. They're older and they can be really intimidated by them.

A Year 11 student also discovered the difficulty of formally instructing younger peers. She had no problems with the use of improvised drama, but found it challenging to teach bullying management concepts to the class.

I enjoyed making up the skits for them, because I think that's the part that they actually listened to. But, I didn't enjoy having to explain the actual stuff about it, because they didn't listen and it became very frustrating.

Lack of support from school administrators

When asked to indicate the degree of support for their peer teaching, 90% of students stated that their teachers had been supportive, followed by other students at 84% and family at 49%. Only 31% of the students rated their school administrations as supportive. Nevertheless, whilst individual teachers also felt that they had not received enough support from their school administration, 71.4% of teachers stated that they were sufficiently supported.

However, the case was different in primary schools that became individually involved in the project separate from their neighbourhood high schools. These schools joined the project independently at the request of their school principal or

classroom teachers, and although the research project was introduced into these schools with the same structure as in the high schools, the peer teaching was not fully implemented and the program was not continued after the first year of implementation. In both cases, the school administration was unwilling to provide the time and resources required to enable the cross-age peer teaching to occur.

Conclusion

As a technique to address conflict management, bullying and student engagement in learning, the use of cross – age peer teaching emerged as a particularly effective strategy in the secondary schools in the study. The questionnaire and interview data confirmed that both the peer teachers and the peer learners acquired valuable understanding and skills in dealing with conflict issues, especially bullying, and significant numbers of students identified as discipline problems and negative leaders exhibited positive behavioural changes once they had been engaged as peer teachers in the project.

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