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Peer mediation services for conflict resolution in schools: what transformations in activity characterise successful implementation?

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This article presents the findings from research conducted at nine schools (seven primary, two secondary) in England, which had previously implemented a peer mediation service for students experiencing 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-intervention had been observed in greater detail. The article utilises activity theory as a conceptual framework for understanding and describing these processes for a number of reasons that will be briefly explained. The findings of this research highlight the need for realistic anticipation of the degree of cultural transformation required to fully support such pupil empowerment initiatives in schools. Peer mediation was most successful in schools where there was a considerable shift in the division of labour, accompanied by the production of new cultural tools that promoted new ways of thinking, speaking and acting with regard to conflict.

Introduction

Students at school normally have a choice between two options for resolving their more difficult interpersonal conflicts (Cohen, 1995; Cremin, 2007): either to resolve the matter themselves (by avoiding, overpowering or negotiating with their disputant) or by reporting the conflict to an adult, who will attempt to make a judgement about the issues (arbitration). Somewhere in between these two approaches is peer mediation, a structured and voluntary process that offers pupils the opportunity to reach an agreement satisfactory to both parties, facilitated by neutral third parties, who ensure

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that certain ground rules are adhered to (Tyrell & Farrell, 1995; Cremin, 2001; Sellman, 2008).

Given the increasing importance being placed on UK schools to consult their pupils; to develop opportunities for greater pupil involvement with organisational and pedagogic decision making (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2001; Oliver & Candappa, 2003; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006); and the duty recently placed on schools to promote community cohesion (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2007), as well as other initiatives (e.g. Citizenship and the Social Emotional Aspects of Learning curriculum), it will become increasingly important to identify and understand the processes involved in giving students greater voice. It is necessary to differentiate between giving students opportunities to be heard or occasionally involved in school affairs and full participation in democratic schools. The latter is perhaps rarer for at least two reasons.

The first is that many schools construct students as citizens 'to be' rather than citizens 'in situ'. As a result, issues concerning 'citizenship' (voice, civic engagement, conflict resolution, etc.) are taught in lessons, representing knowledge to be taken into the adult world in the future, rather than organisational affordances made to facilitate democratic engagement in the present (Hicks, 2001; Clough & Holden, 2002; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). Opportunities for pupil empowerment are subsequently compromised within existing structures, determined by adults (Wyness, 2006). Such a finding was apparent in some of the empirical data reported in this article.

Secondly, pupil empowerment initiatives frequently underestimate the degree, and complexity, of cultural transformation required. One such aspect of transformation is the need to reassess power relations between teachers, other adults in schools, and students (Griffith, 1996; Knight & Sked, 1998; Tyrell, 2002; Sellman, 2003; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006)—another recurring theme for further discussion in this article. Researchers and educationalists may benefit from a more refined analysis of the problematic practices between current/historical approaches and innovations planned. In this article, 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, particularly the impact of intervention at one level upon another, such as when a peer mediation service is introduced. For this reason, a literature review was conducted of social theories that attempt to engage empirically with the relationship between the institution and the individual. From this review, activity theory was selected (see May

[1996] for alternatives) as a theoretical approach equipped with a conceptual language able to describe transformation processes at multiple levels of analysis. The 'activity system' (Engestrom, 1987, 1999a; Hedegaard & Sigersted, 1992) was found to be a particularly useful unit of analysis for depicting such relationships and provides a number of helpful concepts to inform intervention-based research.

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. Tyrell, 2002; Rudduck & Fielding, 2006; 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 the innovative object of peer mediation], it often leads to an aggravated secondary contradiction where some old element (for example, the rules or division of labour) collides with the new one. (Engestrom, 1999b, p. 5)

The approach of resolving 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; Tyrell, 2002; Sellman, 2003), 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 (arbitration by teachers), as shown in Figure 1. This relationship could be depicted as a contradiction between two different activities (as
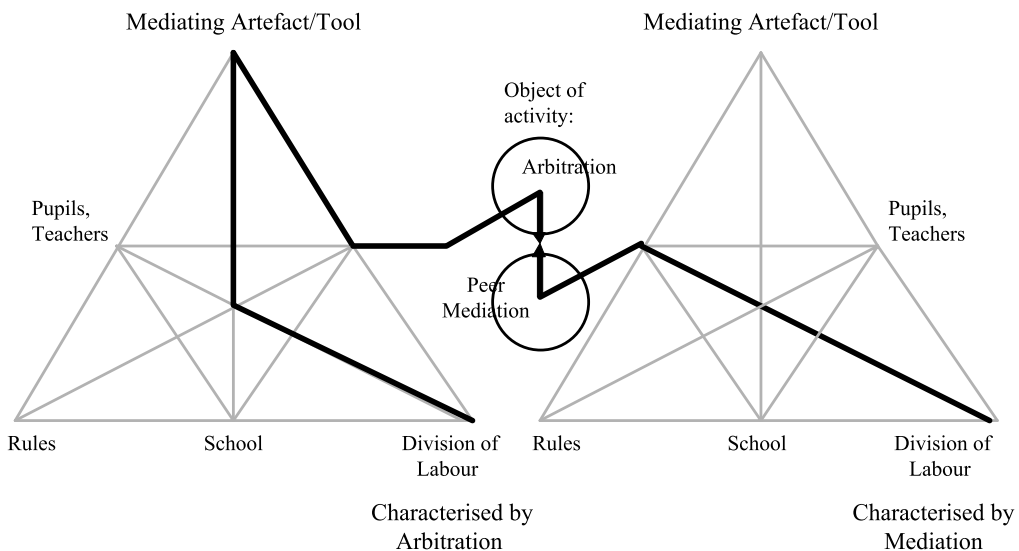

Figure 1.   Contradiction between two alternative models of activity

shown) or as a contradiction between two elements of the same activity, a point frequently discussed by activity theory researchers. Resolving such debates is beyond the scope of this article. However, the depiction of such a contradiction serves to illustrate how activity theory can be and was used to represent how existing social relations may be organised in schools and potentially transformed by intervention to produce new forms of interaction.

Such a unit of analysis has some limitations for the study of comparative models of activity. Daniels (2001a, b) argues that the structure and production of the elements of activity, and the mediating artefact/tool in particular, 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 strongly or weakly 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

The approach of activity theory, as distinct to sociocultural theory and its emphasis on semiotics (e.g. Wertsch, 1991, 1998), has been developed with the transformation of practical activity as both a key explanatory principle for human development and methodology for its study. This is particularly evident in the work of Engestrom (1999b, 2007), who views instability and contradictions within and between activity systems as major propellants of change and development. Such an approach includes the analysis of practical conditions, social relations and psychological phenomena before, during and after intervention.

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:

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.

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
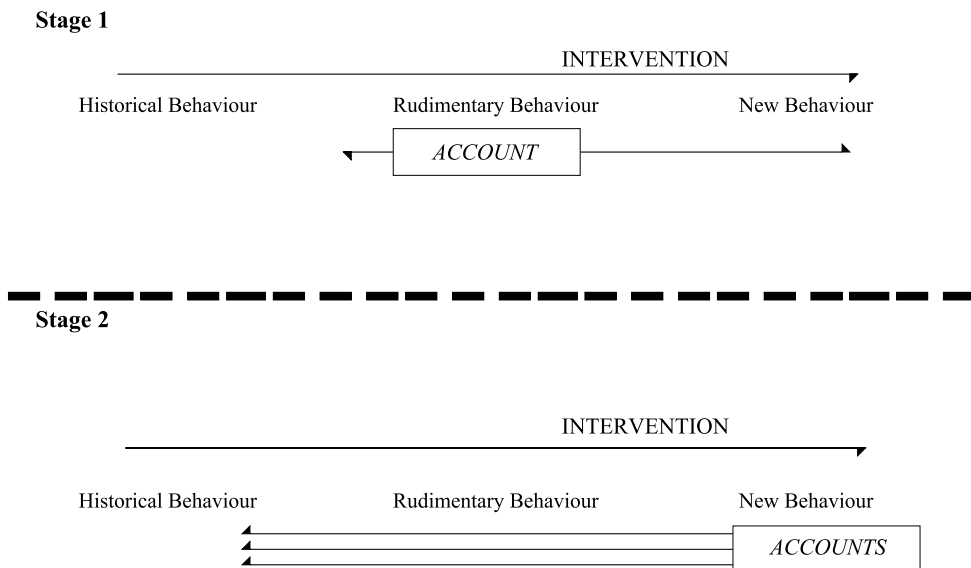

Figure 2.   Research design

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 transformations in traditional activities that may be required for alternative models of activity to be fully and meaningfully implemented

Miles and Huberman (1994) advocate creating a start list of codes, closely related to the conceptual framework of the research, to complete a first-level coding of interview data for thematic analysis. Concepts from activity theory (e.g. contradictions, cultural tools, rules, division of labour, etc.), Bernstein's (2000) theory of cultural transmission (e.g. classification and framing) and key words from conflict theory (e.g. arbitration, negotiation, etc.) were used as a start list for coding interview data. Charmaz (1995) argues that researchers should proceed with sensitivity to unexpected data. Hence, the interview data were reread several times and codes refined as patterns were identified. As an illustration, a segment may have been initially coded as 'division of labour' and later recoded as 'shift in division of labour' as it became clearer that interviewees were referring to whether teachers were or were not prepared to trust their pupils as an issue. The software package NVivo was used to ease comparison of similar codes across the interview sets. In doing so, it was possible to systematically compare how processes coded as 'shift in division of labour' were being described in multiple settings.

Analysis of the interview data using this approach identified three main themes:

- 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 Table 1.

Table 1 indicates a clear relationship between each of these themes being positively reported and the status of the schools' 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

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

		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 positive impact	Running with a positive impact	Running with a positive impact	Running with a positive impact	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.

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 extracts from the interviews will be included 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 pupils' 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 rota.
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 11. 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 is not a straight-forward transference of power from adults to all pupils however. More accurately, it is the wider distribution of power to a subgroup 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 rather than adults to help them in this process.

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 predetermined stages (Tyrrell &

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

Farrell, 1995; Stacey & Robinson, 1997). 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 rewrite 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 deformalised 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 red 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 subgroup. 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 reorganisation 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 remain strongly classified and framed.

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 it's 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 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 does not 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 & 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 & Jenifer, 2007). Research by Griffith (1996), Knight and 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 head teacher, 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 20 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 head teacher, 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 led and mediation isn't and the two things really are [*knocks fists together*] going to clash. They're mutually exclusive. (Teacher, School H)

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.

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 to be 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 it's not what they think it is and that it's different and then they should see that it's 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 italicised 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. Such acts of ventriloquism are well described by Bakhtin (1981) and Wertsch (1991). The pupil's account suggests that many characteristics of this new tool have been internalised. By using the tool in new contexts, she is taking the first steps to externalisation (Vygotsky, 1978). 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. (Head teacher, school E)

Tentatively, such observations suggest that pupils connected with peer mediation may be adopting a more proactive 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 head teacher testifies, there is a potential identity shift. Instead, the pupil participates in creating and proposing a shared 'story' about the conflict, for which they feel greater ownership and ability to participate in its resolution.

The transformation the head teacher 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.

Summary and conclusions

The findings reported in this article suggest that the frequent shortcomings of peer empowerment programmes such as peer mediation 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 & 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.

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