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Evaluation of a School Mediation Experience

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Abstract

This paper shows the educational capacity of school mediation to promote personal development. This paper presents the results on a sample of 50 teachers mediators and 33 peer mediator and 23 pupil participants, aged between 13 and 18 (\bar{x} =15,27 y s =1,543). The findings indicate that: 1) all perceived improvements in their ability to understand the point of view of others, 2) the mediators-teachers and students, helps them analyze the conflict and think of different ways of solution, 3) a mid pupils to help them communicate better and think about the negative consequences of their behaviour, 4) increases the contribution of each pro- people living and increase their participation in school life, 5) the student-mediators and now mid-value the importance of advice and guidance to address the conflicts of life.

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1. Introduction

In the field of academics and schooling it is generally agreed that school mediation is educational, and, to some extent, benefits can be observed. However, only a small area of research tackles these aspects in-depth and collects sustainable evidence. The abundance of associated programmes and schemes has not been supplemented with systematic quality assessment. According to some authors (Flecknoe, 2010; Turkunlu et al., 2010), most initiatives implemented in schools are not assessed. Those that are, on the other hand, focus on whether the process culminates in agreement, or lack of, or only demonstrate the positive aspects, failing to touch on the skills and attitudes learned during the process. Despite the widespread use of mediation, the existence of limited data and lack of rigorousness in methodology seem to prevail. These issues stem from difficulties in trying to record changes in pupils or in the school environment, controlling, as far as possible, external influences or making observations that are also costly and limited.

However, evaluating innovative alternatives is undoubtedly necessary, the planning and application of which will involve investment, research plans and renewed efforts in terms of teacher training. Moreover, highlighting the positive aspects is a call to incorporate content that facilitates pupil socialization and improves coexistence. It is precisely the economic climate in which we find ourselves where mediation methodology is experiencing rapid growth in Spain. After an in-depth theoretical analysis of the core aspects that justify the educational virtualities of mediation (Ibarrola-García and Iriarte, press), comparisons will be made in a study analyzing perceptions (in this

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case of teacher mediators, peer mediators and pupil participants) with regards to school mediation. We have thus set out various objectives:

The central theme of this study is the analysis of perceptions on the socio-affective training undertaken via the mediation process (objective 1). Nevertheless, we are also interested in understanding its impact on the education centre (objective 2).

These are the two primary research objectives. Their study will enable us to confirm the proactive and preventative function of mediation. In this way, we will explore whether mediation facilitates a wide range of key aspects of emotional, cognitive and moral development whilst considering whether mediation creates a culture within the center and acts as a preventative framework for potential conflict. Comparability and contrast between the various groups involved (mediators and participants) with regards to these indicators gives us a more comprehensive and enriched overview.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The following groups were involved in the study: all teachers and peer mediators in Compulsory Secondary Education, Higher Secondary Education and Vocational Training in public, semi-private and private schools in the Navarre region of Spain which, in March 2009 (when data collection began) had undertaken at least one formal mediation process which remained in place in the center for at least one year. It also involved pupil participants who had taken part in at least one full formal mediation process.

In total, 13 education centres across the region of Navarre participated. Firstly, the teacher mediator group was the most extensive and accessible (n=50) as within it there was a small set of teachers trained in mediation. Secondly, 7 of the 13 participating centres offered a peer mediator service (n=33). Thirdly, the pupil participant group was the smallest (n=23); in some cases parental permission was not obtained for participation in the study and in others the centre itself made the decision to not call for participants.

2.2. Procedure and instruments

Three questionnaires were developed (for the teacher mediator, the peer mediator and the pupil participant, respectively) as, in addition to collecting data on the various aspects of interest to the research, this would facilitate tabulation of the responses (using the 1 to 5 Likert scale) and comparability. As no questionnaires could be found fulfilling the objectives set out, the decision was made to generate them from scratch, following the theoretical framework on the empowerment of school mediation and also aided by aspects from assessed mediation initiatives (Bickmore, 2002; Burrell, Zirbel and Allen, 2006; Casella, 2000; Cassineiro and Lane-Garon, 2006; Friedman et al., 2004; Heydenberk and Heydenberk, 2005; Huan, 2004; Jones, 2001, 2006; Naylor and Cowie, 1999; Nix Hale, 2007; Smith, Daunic, Millar and Robinson, 2002; Stevahn, 2004; Theberge, 2004; Terry and Gerber, 1997; Tórrego, 2008). The questionnaires were carefully developed, their content was validated, their psychometric qualities were studied and then they were trialled (Ibarrola-García, S., 2011).

The definitive design for each questionnaire was thus obtained (62 items for the teacher mediator, 63 items for the peer mediator and 56 items for the pupil participant), all three with an identical block sequence: 1) personal information, 2) mediation training received (number of hours, content worked on, training assessment), 3) mediation experience (number and knowledge of mediation processes), 4) pupil profile (performance, character traits), 5) expectations and social validity (operation and external effects on coexistence in general, usefulness attributed to mediation) and 6) perception of socio-affective learning (aspects regarding potential emotional, cognitive and moral learning in mediation).

SPSS software, version 15, was used for data analysis. Various statistical techniques were used for the descriptive study of the items (averages and standard deviations on the one hand and frequencies on the other), groups were

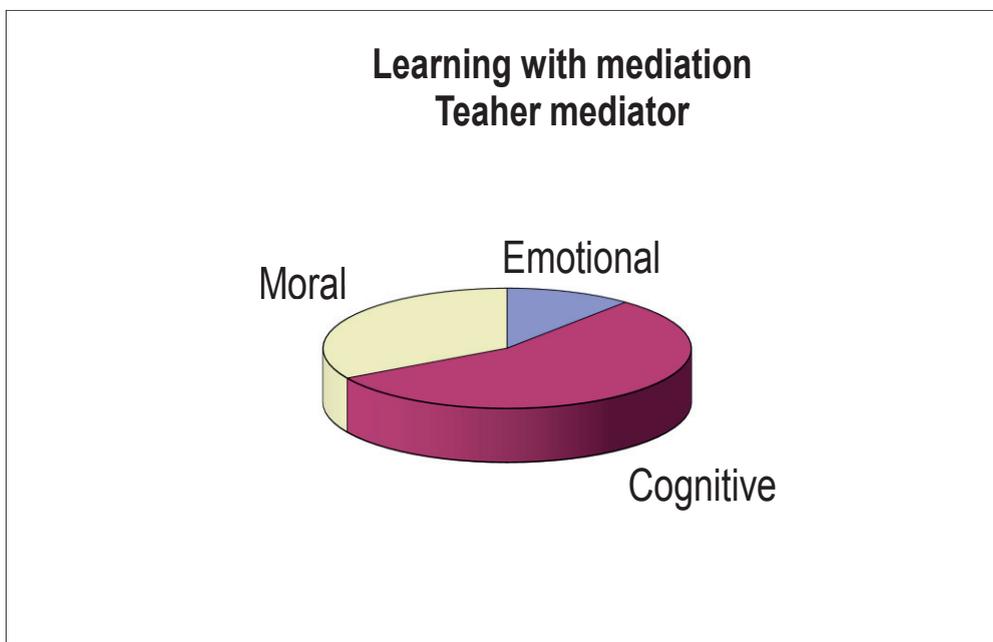
compared (student's t and ANOVA for parametric testing and Mann-Whitney U) and factors were correlated (Pearson R).

3. Discussion and results

The descriptive study carried out enabled us to compare and contrast multiple items and to enter into an in-depth discussion which proves difficult to tackle within the boundaries of this study. For each of the three groups, we will describe only the most noteworthy aspects within the socio-affective capacity section, first distinguishing emotional, then cognitive and lastly moral factors.

3.1. Perception of socio-affective learning: which emotional, cognitive and moral aspects are fostered by mediation?

A total of 73.9% of the teacher mediators consider that mediation has helped them learn and improve on a personal level. Moreover, 51.5% of the peer mediators and 56.5% of the pupil participants state that they have put skills learned via mediation into practice in other areas of schooling. It should be noted that pupil participants score emotional and moral improvements the highest (above an average of 3.7 on the 1 to 5 Likert scale) whilst in the teacher/peer mediator groups the highest scoring items relate to cognitive and moral improvements or learning (figure 1) which is discussed below.



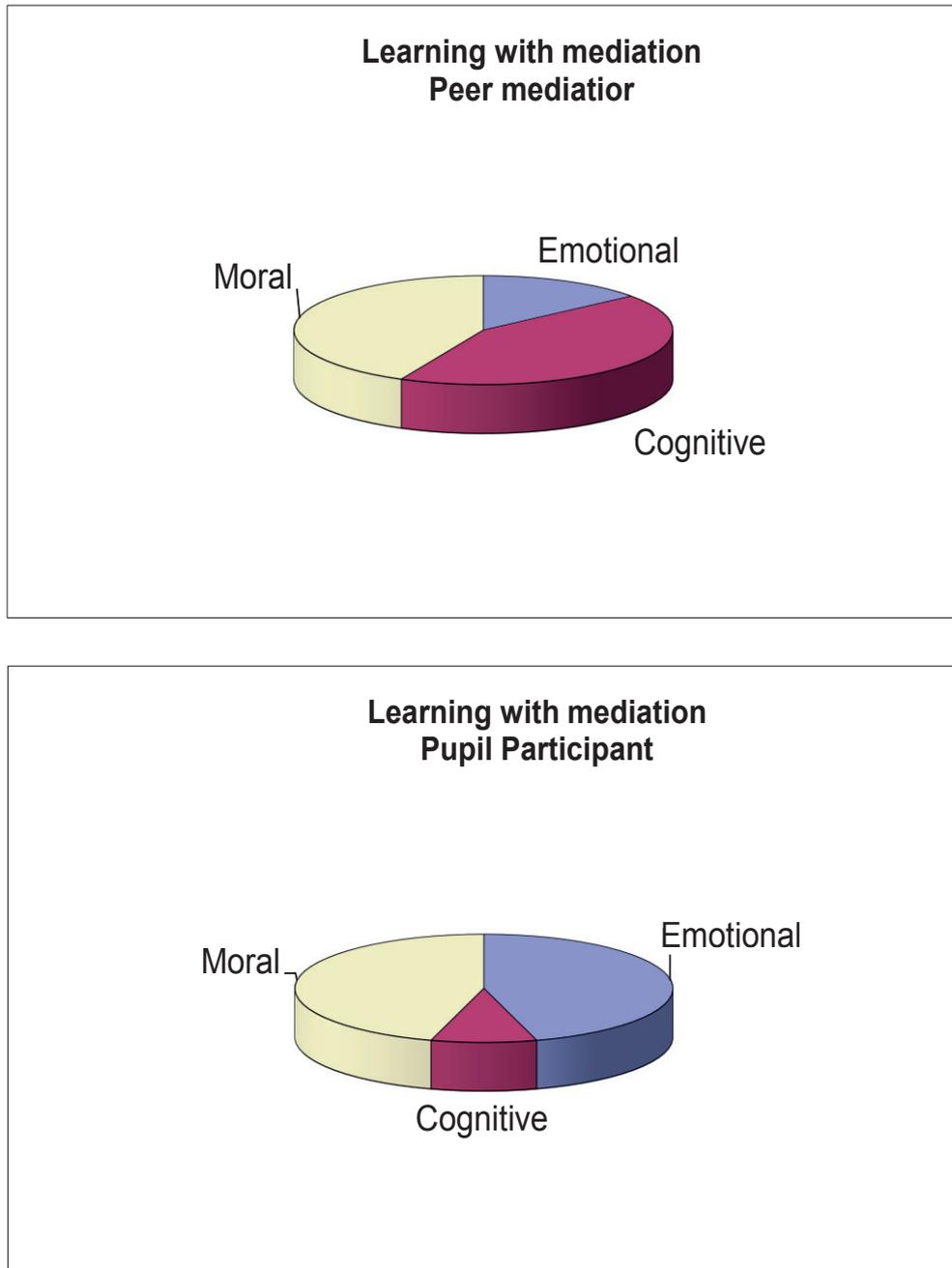


Figure 1. Distribution of the highest scoring items

3.1.1 The perception of emotional learning

Mediation helps the teacher mediator better understand the points of view of others ($\bar{x} = 4.3$). Empathy scores differently from other items and is not linked to age, sex, previous training or years of working experience. Next, the

two aspects scoring closest to 4 relate to emotional self-awareness: realising that emotions influence behaviour ($\bar{x} = 3.61$) and being able to identify any negative emotions felt ($\bar{x} = 3.59$).

Peer mediators also rate empathy in the first place; however, the difference in relation to the other emotional elements is not as pronounced as in the teacher group ($\bar{x} = 3.87$). Other studies (Long, Fabricius, Musheno and Palumbo, 1998; Lane-Garon and Richardson, 2003) also note significant influence on the empathy of these pupils who are able to manage their emotions. The peers and teachers both score another factor in second position: mediation helping them to realise that emotions influence behaviour ($\bar{x} = 3.64$) and to understand the differences that sometimes occur in what a person feels, thinks or values ($\bar{x} = 3.61$).

Lastly, the pupil participants score the way in which mediation helps them better communicate with others most highly ($\bar{x} = 3.83$), although, mediation helping them to identify any negative emotions felt scores almost as highly ($\bar{x} = 3.82$). These two factors are followed closely by empathy ($\bar{x} = 3.78$).

Figure 2 presents the scores given for the 10 emotional items by the three groups (teacher mediator in the first column, peer mediator in the second and pupil participant in the third). The shaded columns highlight the highest scoring aspects within a group. Thus, three aspects score the highest in more than one group: empathy (item 1), awareness of negative emotions (item 3) and affective dissonance (item 5).

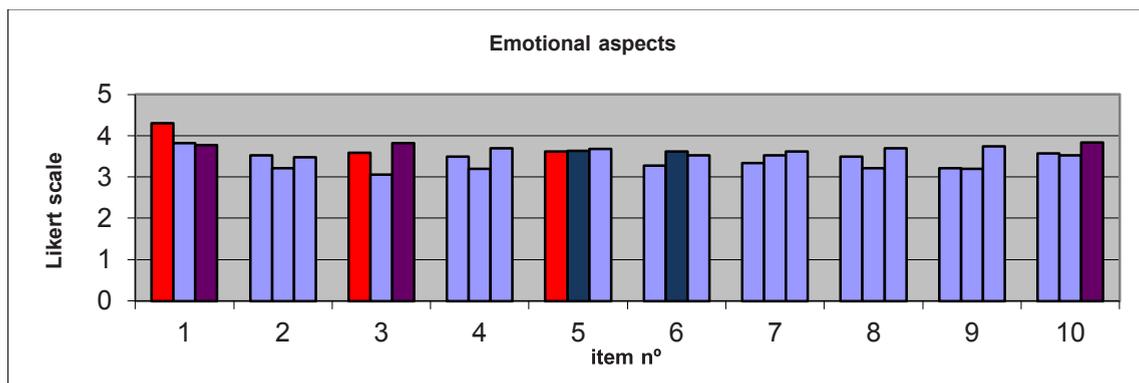


Figure 2. Distribution of scores for emotional learning items

3.1.2 The perception of cognitive learning

The way in which mediation fosters alternative thinking is particularly noteworthy in teacher mediators, i.e. the teachers score the help given to stop to think of different ways to resolve conflict highly ($\bar{x} = 3.96$). The teachers place conflict analysis in second place, i.e. learning that involves analyzing conflicts without being swayed by personal opinions ($\bar{x} = 3.83$).

The peer mediators agree with the teachers on the two highest scoring cognitive aspects, but in reverse order. The difference is minimal, however; learning facilitated by mediation for analyzing conflicts without being swayed by personal opinions scored highest ($\bar{x} = 3.91$) and alternative thought came in second place, i.e. stopping to think of different ways to resolve a conflict ($\bar{x} = 3.88$).

For mediators (both peers and teachers) mediation facilitates the use of terms relative to conflict resolution and problem solving skills.

In contrast to the mediators (teachers and peers) pupil participants score consequential thinking, i.e. stopping to think about the consequences of not behaving correctly ($\bar{x} = 3.78$) and means-end thinking, i.e. whether their behaviour will actually help them to achieve what they set out to do ($\bar{x} = 3.48$) most highly. The mediation process helps them to understand the consequences of their actions or behaviour. Moreover, it leads them to consider what they wanted to achieve with their behaviour or attitude in the first place and if their behaviour would actually help them to achieve this.

Taking an overall view of the three groups, figure 3 shows two aspects that score the highest in more than one group: conflict analysis (item 2) and alternative thought (item 4).

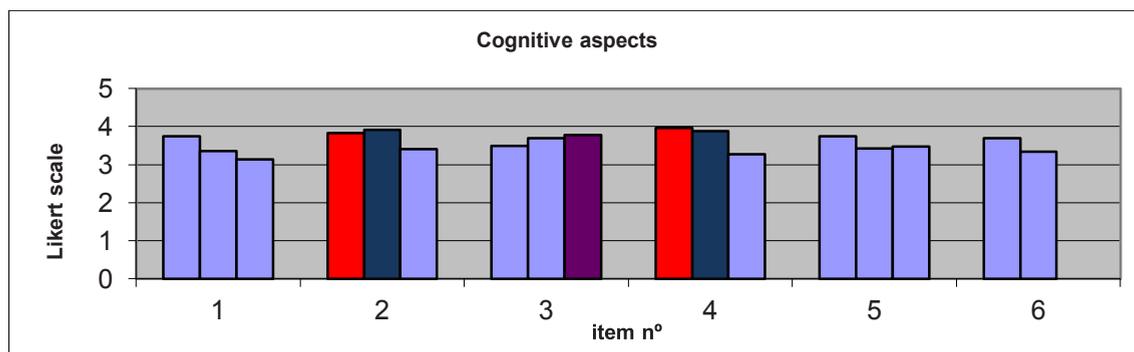


Figure 3. Distribution of scores for cognitive learning items

3.1.3 The perception of moral learning

The three highest scoring aspects relate to the teacher's contribution to the environment with regards to improving coexistence. The *teacher mediators* feel more involved in day-to-day school life and particularly in situations in which they can participate ($\bar{x} = 3.96$); they place increased importance on what they can each do to foster successful coexistence ($\bar{x} = 3.87$) and on their responsibility for resolving their own conflicts ($\bar{x} = 3.76$). Mediation positively influences a teacher's willingness; whether awakening a civil consciousness or simply providing a motive for implementation. It considers that participation and responsibility lie with the individual and others; it is a *sine qua non* condition for achieving a positive culture of coexistence within the education centre.

On the other hand, moral aspects attract our attention in the *peer mediator* group; in particular, the item referring to the importance of knowing to ask for help when needed scores the highest ($\bar{x} = 3.91$). Peer mediators place most importance on what each individual can do to achieve successful coexistence ($\bar{x} = 3.82$). The third highest scoring item relates to being more respectful and accepting differences in the people they meet ($\bar{x} = 3.82$). These pupils feel that their own attitude can contribute to improving coexistence, thereby developing a sense of social responsibility or, as other authors have also suggested, their internal control locus (Noaks and Noaks, 2009), leadership skills (Terry and Gerber, 1997) and participation, well-being and comfort in school (Bickmore, 2002).

Lastly, *pupil participants* rate confidentiality highest, i.e. they place increased importance on not talking negatively about others behind their backs ($\bar{x} = 3.96$). In the second place, the pupil participants feel that mediation helps them better understand what is right and wrong ($\bar{x} = 3.91$). Thus, as stated by Heydenberk and Heydenberk (2005), mediation (which is strongly within their interests) enables them to take on a more social and selfless perspective. They can also feel as though they are cared for and sense that the simple act of showing interest in their problems forms part of a process which is fairer than the punitive process based solely on exclusion and punishment. Thirdly, the pupil participants also see (like peer mediators) the importance of asking for help when needed ($\bar{x} = 3.78$) as a significant personal resource that generates a feeling of independence, unearthing self-sufficiency and individualism.

Figure 4 shows an item which scores highest in more than one group: social responsibility in coexistence (item 6).

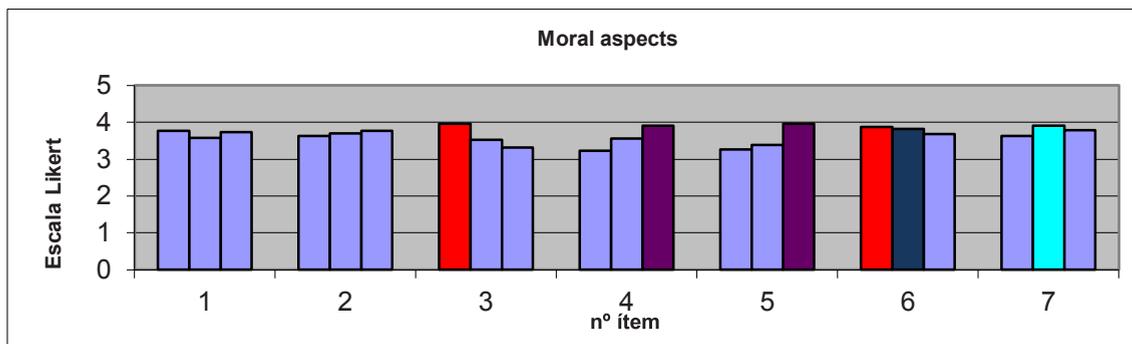


Figure 4. Distribution of scores for moral learning items

4. Conclusions

1) The teacher mediator believes, to a greater extent than the peer mediator, that mediation improves the ability to better understand the point of view of others, helps to reduce the intergenerational barrier and enables individuals to better understand their experiences. Moreover, it helps to identify negative emotions (therefore reflective experience is higher in teachers) and to feel involved in the life of the education centre.

2) In the two pupil groups (mediator and participant) there are significant differences in self-awareness of negative emotions, in conflict analysis and in alternative thinking. Mediation helps pupil participants (more so than peer mediators) to identify negative emotions. This seems fairly logical if we consider that pupil participants go through the mediation process loaded with negative emotions. On the other hand, peer mediators learn, more so than pupil participants, to analyze conflicts and think of alternative resolutions to conflicts, aspects undoubtedly fostered by training and using mediation as a conflict resolution strategy.

3) Greater improvement with regards to empathy is noted in the teacher mediator, compared to the pupil participant; the way mediation helps to see conflict in a more positive manner, to think of different ways to resolve it and to participate in the daily life of the centre. The pupil participant rates highly (significantly higher than the teacher mediator) the help mediation provides for better understanding what is right and wrong and also for placing more importance on not talking negatively about others behind their backs. Pupil participants also reveal the importance placed on giving ethical and moral meaning to individuals' and others' behaviour.

4) Although mediation is inherently associated with conflict, it is undertaken from a preventative (to avoid escalation) and proactive (education for coexistence) standpoint. Furthermore, although participants are the individuals who reap the direct benefits, mediation is advantageous for the entire school environment. These results remark the importance of integrating mediation into the processes of school improvement from a global perspective and through prevention strategies and conflict resolution.

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