

M-Educa Program: Training Student Mediators

Programa M-Educa: Formación de alumnos mediadores

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Abstract: This article presents the design of the M-Educa Program for Educational Orientation and Mediation, as a proposal for educational innovation aimed at responding to the need presented by some centers to integrate effective actions in their educational projects and coexistence plans. Next, the general points of the program developed in a Spanish educational centre are shown, more specifically, the training of the mediator student team will be deepened, presenting below a summary of the didactic guide designed by the author for this purpose. For this, the general characteristics of the formation of the student team, the objectives set, the blocks of content worked are detailed, in the same way as the criteria taken into account for the evaluation and final selection of the mediators, in which the intention was not only to prevent violence in response to a disagreement, but also to improve the skills of the educational community.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta el diseño del Programa M-Educa de Orientación y Mediación Educativa, como una propuesta de innovación educativa orientada a dar respuesta a la necesidad que presentan algunos centros de integrar acciones efectivas en sus proyectos educativos y planes de convivencia. A continuación, se muestran los puntos generales del programa desarrollado en un centro educativo español, más concretamente, se profundizará en la formación del equipo de estudiantes mediadores, presentando a continuación un resumen de la guía didáctica diseñada por el autor a tal efecto. Para ello, se detallan las características generales de la formación del equipo de alumnos, los objetivos planteados, los bloques de contenidos trabajados, de la misma forma que los criterios tenidos en cuenta para la evaluación y selección final de los mediadores, en los que la intención no fue solo para prevenir la violencia en respuesta a un desacuerdo, sino también para mejorar las habilidades de la comunidad educativa.

Keywords: mediation, education, training, students, primary school

Palabras clave: mediación, educación, capacitación, estudiantes, escuela primaria

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Introduction

Currently, there are many initiatives aimed at improving social relations in educational centres. Although, students and teachers usually value the school climate in a positive way, they also indicate that it is common for misunderstandings to occur that cause specific conflicts that affect the coexistence of the educational community (Díaz-Aguado, 2008; Córdoba, Del Rey, Casas y Ortega, 2016). Therefore, the proposed interventions tend to include not only the students, but also the teachers, families and other staff at the centre (Defensor del Pueblo, 2007; OCA, 2016). Taking into account that educational institutions are one of the engines in the social growth of students, as they are a space where a multitude of interactions take place between their agents, we can highlight their relevance in the transfer of values and intensification of pro-social behaviours. The expected result of these initiatives will be interactions based on dialogue, where violent responses are prevented through a peaceful model in solving problems (Ttoffi and Farrington, 2011). One of the measures adopted to achieve this has been the implementation of programs for the formation of teams of mediators, whose objective is to provide an alternative through the conflict resolution that improves communication (Tirado and Conde, 2015; Andreou, 2015) as well as of a feeling of community within the group through a more active participation by all its members (Cowie and Fernández, 2006).

Mediation appears in the educational context as a reconciliation procedure based on the identification of needs, which starts from a misunderstanding, confrontation or tension and allows the establishment of agreements through dialogue, causing a situation of psychological reciprocity that in situations of violence tends to be minimised (Smith, 2011). The interventions of the mediators will then be relevant as from the initial phases of the conflict as a protective factor against violent reactions amongst students (Andreou, 2015) as well as in later stages, when there is an increase in emotional tension between those involved. On the other hand, it is also necessary to highlight the educational function of conflict resolution through mediation, since it helps to analyse the real situation of all parties involved, addressing it from a joint perspective, which would then empower them to reach consensual and satisfactory agreements to both sides (Boqué, 2007). For this reason, mediation in the school environment is a process that enhances cultural reforms through resolving disagreements, where a dialogue and collaborative methodology is promoted in the search for solutions, which would then help to promote values for positive coexistence so that autonomy is developed and non-violent socialization is activated (Bonafé-Schmitt, 2000; Maxwell, 2007; Gatt, Puigdemívol, and Molina, 2010). Consequently, Carrasco Pons, Villá Taberner and Ponferrada Arteaga (2016), point out that

the positive impact of mediation in the school environment has led to general expansion of the practice and it is inclusion amongst proposals for an improved school climate.

The challenge of proposing a mediation training program must start from an exhaustive analysis of the context, evaluating both the characteristics of the center and its resources as well as coexistence at the institutional level and within classrooms. This previous step will facilitate the selection of the appropriate proposal, ensuring its viability and effectiveness (Prada and Lopez, 2008). The choice and learning process of the team of school mediators will be decisive and will have a direct impact on the development and evolution of mediations. The training should help future mediators to channel the communication of the parties involved without making contributions or suggestions that may manipulate opinions for religious reasons, ethnicity or any other circumstance that affects neutrality. In the same way, the instructional period would train towards a wider viewpoint problem, helping the students to identify their conflicts, managing the moments of blockages and stagnations during the conversations. Consequently, the proper learning of the candidates will be essential so that they can mediate conflicts in the school context and, in turn, be legitimate figures (Ibarrola and Iriarte, 2012), who can act as figures of approach to reality and guarantee that the solutions provided by those involved are viable in their fulfillment. It should be emphasized that initiatives aimed at improving interpersonal relationships in schools, such as the incorporation of educational mediation, will contribute to the objective established by the curriculum of sensitizing the school community about the importance of preventing violence or avoiding discrimination. Its purpose, therefore, directly or indirectly, places special emphasis on bringing the educational community closer to more peaceful ways of relating and effectively coping with conflicts.

This article presents the design of the M-Educa Program for Educational Orientation and Mediation, as a proposal for educational innovation aimed at responding to the need presented by some centers to integrate effective actions in their educational projects and coexistence plans. Next, the general points of the program developed in a Spanish educational centre are shown, more specifically, the training of the mediator student team will be deepened, presenting below a summary of the didactic guide designed by the author for this purpose. For this, the general characteristics of the formation of the student team, the objectives set, the blocks of content worked are detailed, in the same way as the criteria taken into account for the evaluation and final selection of the mediators, in which the intention was not only to prevent violence in response to a disagreement, but also improve the skills of the educational community, as well as provide the center with a mediation and advice service in conflicts that

will facilitate the autonomous intervention of conflicts from the educational institution (Domínguez, Álvarez and Vázquez, 2017).

Design of the intervention

Presentation and timing of the M-Educa program

The M-Educa program was designed by the author for the care and training of educational communities in conflict resolution and mediation. The proposal included the dissemination of Mediation as a means of dispute resolution in the school context, as well as the creation of a team of mediators through specific training courses for the educational community. Its implementation was temporalized in three academic years and a public center for Infant and Primary Education in Madrid was invited in 2014 to develop it in a "pilot" format..

Application phases:

Phase 1

- Contact with the center.
- Previous informative meetings.
- Evaluation of coexistence.

Phase 2

- External Orientation and Mediation Service.
- Training of a team of mediator students in the 5th and 6th year of primary education.
- Training of Primary Education students in positive conflict resolution.
- Informative meetings with families.
- Informative meetings with the administrative and service personnel of the centre.

Phase 3

- External Orientation and Mediation Service.
- Teacher training at the center.

The first meetings began with the management team that decided to study the proposal. Subsequently, it was accepted by the management and the faculty, and approved by the School Council of the center. At the same time, the intention to collect data for informational or research purposes was presented, without objection from any group of this educational community. During this period, all the information provided by both the educational agents and the psychopedagogical guidance team was compiled before and after the intervention, as well as in the different documents of the center that regulate coexistence contained in plans, previous initiatives, disciplinary proceedings or the regime regulations internal, which allowed adjusting the proposal to the specific needs of the school.

Once the M-Educa program was included in the Center's Coexistence Plan, in September 2015 the second phase began, with the establishment of an Orientation and Mediation Service, where informative talks and work sessions were organized with students of all Primary Education courses. On

the other hand, the center supported the intensification of contents related to the positive resolution of conflicts, for which a weekly session per class was included with the instructor-mediator within the subject of Social and Civic Values. Likewise, during the first session, all Primary Education students voluntarily took the Thomas-Kilmann Questionnaire (García, 2008) to determine how to face conflict situations, developed by psychologists, Kenneth Thomas (University of California), and Ralph Kilmann, (University of Pittsburg) who designed this test that has been used since the eighties to identify the coping style of a subject, through 30 simple questions. This questionnaire was applied again at the end of the training of the Primary Education students in order to assess the changes. On a quarterly basis, parents were informed through meetings of the importance of promoting these new skills at home as well.

In the third phase, the faculty is offered a 20-hour course on "Tools for the positive management of school conflicts" through the Territorial Center for Innovation and Teacher Training of the Community of Madrid. During this phase, the Orientation and Mediation service continues to attend to all the demands that were requested..

Training of student mediators

The training model used has as a reference point the Contextualized Educational Mediation of Sánchez García-Arista (2013). Prior beginning with the selection of students, the families were informed about the experience, proceeding to request authorization in order to the 5th and 6th year students could opt for training as mediators. The selection process in each class was done by voting and voluntary acceptance. The initial team of student mediators consisted of total of 18 students.

The proposal for the training of mediator students within the program includes a total of 15 theoretical-practical sessions of 45 minutes, at the rate of one session per week, from October to February, in which the students who aspired to be mediators developed activities aimed at improving their social and communication skills, learning to correctly analyse conflict situations, improving their emotional education and practising peaceful conflict resolution techniques in simulating cases.

From February to May, another 10 sessions were held to perform role-playing among the team of mediators and activities designed for training in mediation, with the discussion of cases proposed by the students. The 15 theoretical-practical sessions were held during Physical Education classes and the 10 training sessions during recess one day of the week. During this period, some extra sessions were dedicated to coordinating the team, following up on cases and reflecting on the mediators, which allowed the development of colla-

borative learning and control of the team's good progress.

The mediations were carried out in the playground, in a covered gymnasium and monitored from the outside by the teachers or caregivers. In this space, a mailbox was placed for students to deposit mediation applications. The formal interventions carried out reached a total number of 101 cases attended, of which 93% concluded in an agreement established by all parties, as recorded in the records of the team.

Objectives

The objectives of this program have been adapted to develop the objective of the Physical Education subject in the Primary Education stage, which, as indicated by educational legislation, is to be a means to promote personal and social development as well as the general objective collected in Decree 89/2014 of July 24, which establishes the Primary Education Curriculum for the Community of Madrid to "participate in physical activities sharing projects, establishing cooperative relationships to achieve common objectives, resolving conflicts that may arise through dialogue could arise and avoid discrimination due to personal, gender, social and cultural characteristics and that are linked to the development of social and civic competence".

General objectives:

- Develop communication skills in students that allow them to express their own emotions and recognise those of others.
- Increase the social skills of students, deepening empathy as an aspect of improvement in coexistence.
- Assimilate effective and non-violent ways to resolve their interpersonal conflicts.
- Promote mediation as a means of conflict resolution.

Specific objectives

- Express their own emotions through verbal and gestural language.
- Identify emotional states, especially those related to conflict situations.
- Develop empathy and assertiveness as positive aspects of relationships with others.
- Differentiate the different styles of coping with the conflict and its social implications.
- Show interest in effective communication and in peaceful conflict resolution systems.
- Learn the role of the mediator, its characteristics and functions.
- Increase their skills to mediate conflicts of others.

Contents

The contents offered by this training program have five theoretical-practical blocks.

- Module 1. The conflict.

- o Definition of the conflict.
- o Elements, phases and analysis of the conflict situation.
- o Causes or origin of the disagreements.
- o Styles or attitudes to cope with the conflict.
- o Education for Peace and school coexistence.
- Module 2. Development of communication skills.
 - o Elements and styles of communication.
 - o Active listening in the dialogue process.
 - o Non-verbal communication.
 - o Assertiveness and empathy.
 - o Use of positive language.
- Module 3. Positive conflict management.
 - o Self-concept and self-esteem
 - o Self-control in angry or frustrating situations.
 - o Social skills for conflict resolution.
 - o Collaboration as a strategy for solving problems.
 - o Prevention of bullying.
- Module 4. The Mediation process
 - o Role, functions and ethics of the mediator.
 - o Mediable and non mediable conflicts.
 - o Phases of mediation.
 - o Co-mediation.
 - o Overcoming blockages and managing intense emotions.
- Module 5. Internships in Mediation.
 - o Preparation and presentation of the mediator.
 - o Collection and selection of information.
 - o Returns and clarification of the problem.
 - o Types of questions and generation of solutions.
 - o Preparation of agreements and monitoring.

Methodology

Throughout the sessions of the program, an active and participatory methodology was used, whereby main paradigm was a participatory pedagogy and a horizontal and two-way communicative model which promoted the collective construction of group knowledge (Gil, 2019). For this reason, the learning base was the students' own experiences, from which the new learnings were built, to guarantee that they were really meaningful. In this sense, and following Torrego (2006), this proposal is based on three methodological lines: motivation, activity and work among equals..

Starting from the opinions and reflections initially provided by the students, their prior knowledge on each issue raised was identified, thus progressively generating a climate of security to transmit their own ideas or experiences. One of the goals was also to create a climate of trust among the team members, in which each student could participate voluntarily, in order to increase group cohesion. It is important in this regard that the activities were varied and attractive,

including different cooperative activities during the training, with the aim of reaching solutions could be created by the mediators group..

Evaluation of the student mediators

The evaluation of the mediators was carried out taking into account their involvement in the training, assessing the management of simulated conflict situations, weekly tasks and with two knowledge assessment processes through written tests and tasks designed for this purpose. Throughout the course, this group was reduced to 9 students for different reasons. Some of these cases were due to not passing the evaluations, changes of school or voluntary abandonment of the program.

As established by Decree 89/2014 of July 24, which establishes the Primary Education Curriculum for the Community of Madrid, the evaluation of the students was continuous and global. For this reason, a follow-up evaluation was carried out through direct observations and the trainer's annotations, evaluation of tasks and co-evaluation activities, which allowed an assessment of the achievement of the proposed objectives. As a reference for the analysis, some evaluation criteria for the mediator students were established.

Evaluation criteria:

- Expresses their own emotions and feelings when they have a conflict.
- Identify the importance of communication as a way to solve a problem.
- Understands the different points of view in a conflict and facilitate their understanding using mediation techniques.
- Actively participates in group activities and performs tasks aimed at training as a mediator.
- Uses assertive responses and foster empathy in conflict situations.
- It recognizes the stages of mediation and collects relevant information in the records of its interventions.
- Actively listens to the opinions of others without making personal judgments or evaluations.
- Respects confidentiality and provide confidence to the media in their interventions.
- Encourages the positive and collaborative solution of a problem between colleagues.

Conclusions

The purpose of this program was to create a team of students trained who are learning to mediate conflicts with their peers. To do this, they had to know the strategies and skills necessary to perform the functions of a conflict mediator. Through the action of the team of mediators, the intention was to reduce violent responses, both verbal and

physical, in the centre where the training was implanted. This aspect and according to what was previously founded, would help prevent the appearance of violence between equals, and consequently will improve the socio-affective climate of the educational community, having a beneficial impact on the lives of the students themselves, but also those of teachers and parents.

Feedback from the teachers who were interviewed before and after applying the program in their classrooms, was incredibly positive. Among other aspects, they highlight the influence perceived by teachers in improving the autonomy of students in the face of interpersonal conflict. In this sense, the program seems to have improved the self-management of the conflict and the responsibility towards it on the part of the students, being a key aspect, since they resort far less frequently to the figure of the teacher, choosing the team of mediators to try to solve it. In addition, the teachers indicated an increase in reflection processes in the face of conflict and greater displays of empathy, which had generated more collaborative attitudes and respect for individual differences in their classrooms.

Regarding the students of the Primary Education stage, who were evaluated before and after the implementation of the program with the Thomas-Kilmann Questionnaire, they show an evolution in their styles of coping with the conflict. To analyze this data, the style that they initially showed was demonstrated, where there was a predominance of the competitive and evasive style. In the second measure after training with the same questionnaire, the students show a trend in coping with conflict that is closer to collaborative positions, increasing the collaborative coping style among students by 43%. This fact informs us that the M-Educa mediation program has helped to improve coexistence and has fostered dialogue as a way of understanding the needs of the other and expressing their own among students who have received training in positive conflict resolution

Participation in the training activities in mediation was very high, according to the records as a trainer, 90% of the proposals were made by the entire team of mediators. The students were involved by contributing their personal experiences in an open way and group work was fundamental to generate cohesion and collaborative work, feeling themselves protagonists of their own learning. This fact has generated a feeling of responsibility towards their own actions as mediators.

The participatory methodology not only improved their autonomy in the face of conflict, but also provided security, greater knowledge to analyze it, and reflect on situations that can be extrapolated to their life outside the centre. The different and varied groupings in the activities were motivating, and have fostered a social interaction in the groups, which

allowed them to get to know each other better and integrate those students who could initially be less autonomous as they have found a space in which to interact.

The M-Educa program was useful for working on social and civic competence, during which respect for differences was worked, which encourages students to create a peaceful and friendly learning environment for themselves, that will affect the general climate of the center. The evaluation of the program was positive, offering learning aimed at conflict management and preventing violence in response to a disagreement.

However, this proposal also had some limitations. It would be interesting to present it as a content to be developed from the Early Childhood Education stage, with the aim that from an early age, effective, positive and peaceful conflict resolution skills are developed. This learning base would allow to incorporate more complex strategies during the Primary Education stage, being able to deepen in techniques for handling conflictive situations. Second, it is important that the entire educational community participate in transmitting these values to students. For this, teacher training and information to families in this matter will ensure and reinforce the new attitudes that these students may be developing, as adults, not only transmitters of the tool that mediation supposes, but also acting as management models in moments of discrepancy. Therefore, future lines of work will be oriented to the global formation of the educational community that includes all educational agents, as well as the members that make up the school communities

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