



RESEARCH PAPER

Positioning Peer Mediation as a Core Strategy for Behavioral Intervention and Conflict Resolution in Educational Settings

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ABSTRACT

The widespread belief that modern youngsters exhibit greater rudeness than earlier generations is frequently inaccurately linked to a decline in corporal punishment. Researches shows that a lot of work needs to be done to teach young people how to mediate between themselves and others. This is important because mediating between students is a much better way to solve problems than having the authority step in and punish them. A lot of the comments we hear about young people today are just the same old “kids these days” thought process. But there are good reasons for it. Many kids don’t get enough chances to learn how to deal with arguments or fix problems on their own because both parents work long hours and often give too much praise. Families are also less close together than they used to be. It’s clear that they aren’t getting enough practice. People think that a lot of kids’ behaviour is rude and because of this. Based on study, it is thought that punishment and discipline are not very good ways to solve problems. It can be very helpful and successful for educational institutions to offer peer mediation training to settle any kind of disagreement. By giving mediators better skills like active listening, empathy, and working together to solve young people’s problems, we can get to the root cause of behaviour problems and help kids learn how to deal with social problems. This will eventually get rid of the need for physical punishment, and if pilot studies are done correctly, peer mediation programs can be expanded into schools.

Keywords: Peer mediation, conflict resolution, generational bias, kids these days effect, child behavior, social-emotional learning, corporal punishment, six-pocket syndrome

A recurring cross-cultural narrative asserts that contemporary youngsters exhibit greater disrespect, diminished discipline, and overall, less desirable behavior compared to earlier generations. In modern Indian society, this viewpoint often emerges in demands for a reinstatement of stringent discipline practices, including physical punishment, which is frequently remembered as an effective and uncomplicated remedy. This research contests this narrative by presenting and analyzing the concept of the “mediation deficit”, the pervasive deficiency in conflict resolution training that contributes to numerous contemporary behavioral issues.

Researchers argue that the observed rudeness in youngsters is not a character flaw but rather a deficiency in abilities, principally arising from an inability to skillfully manage internal emotional states and exterior social conflicts. The “kids these days” effect (Proctor *et al.* 2020) offers an essential perspective on the historical and

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psychological persistence of this generational grievance, yet it fails to adequately address the particular socio-structural transformations that have diminished conventional, informal methods for acquiring conflict resolution skills. This paper will initially deconstruct generational prejudice, followed by an analysis of contemporary etiologies, developmental, familial, and societal that contribute to the mediation gap. Ultimately, it will establish formal peer mediation not only as an intervention but as an essential educational element to address this deficiency, cultivating a generation proficient in prosocial interaction skills.

Generation Z has generally grown as digital natives, spending significant portions of their early years engaged with smartphones, tablets, and laptops in primarily nuclear families where parental absence due to work responsibilities is frequently observed. This atmosphere, marked by extensive technology usage, diminished time spent in outdoors, and decreased daily emotional connections with parents and extended family, can render everyday life mechanical and increase dependence on machines as the new standard. This parenting is linked to difficulties in emotional regulation and the development of interpersonal skills, resulting in many young individuals being less adept at managing internal tensions and resolving disputes constructively. Punitive or solely disciplinary measures are improbable to cultivate these capacities. Evidence endorses constructive, skills-oriented methodologies, including structured peer mediation and restorative practice programs, which explicitly impart communication, empathy, and conflict-resolution skills. These approaches have demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing relationships, diminishing conflict occurrences, and cultivating healthier community and school settings learning environments. (Twenge, 2017; Anderson & Jiang, 2018; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Morrison, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

Understanding the ‘Kids These Days’ Effect”

The notion that younger generations are experiencing moral, cognitive, or behavioral decline compared to

their predecessors is not a contemporary cultural concern but a well-documented psychological and historical occurrence. Social psychologists Proctor *et al.* (2020) characterize this phenomenon as the “kids these days” (KTD) effect, a widespread cognitive distortion in which adults consistently misremember their own adolescent behavior, romanticizing their past actions while concurrently focusing selectively on and harshly condemning the negative behaviors of current youth. This dual-process bias causes a misleading yet persuasive sense of moral and behavioral decline across generations throughout time. Proctor *et al.* (2020) importantly demonstrated through longitudinal and cross-sectional studies that this effect endures despite objective behavioral data indicating no significant decline or, in certain areas, actual improvement in youth outcomes such as prosocial behavior, academic engagement, and substance use rates. The KTD impact is exacerbated by availability heuristics, as negative and sensationalized media representations of adolescents are more cognitively available than ordinary or positive examples of teenage behavior (Proctor *et al.* 2020). Historically, analogous generational critiques have been recorded since ancient Greece, with Aristotle and Plato expressing similar apprehensions regarding the perceived recklessness of youth, indicating that this phenomenon is not solely a consequence of contemporary social media or modern parenting practices, but rather a persistent aspect of human social cognition (Proctor *et al.* 2020). Furthermore, the effect seems asymmetrical: adults are far more inclined to ascribe unfavorable characteristics to others’ children than to their own, a phenomenon attributed by Proctor *et al.* (2020) to motivational self-enhancement and in-group/out-group distinction. Proctor *et al.* (2020) utilized retrospective recall tasks, longitudinal behavioral tracking, and experimentally manipulated vignettes to identify the cognitive mechanisms underlying the illusion, dismissing alternative explanations like genuine cohort differences in moral reasoning or executive function. The scientists discovered that the KTD effect diminished when participants were prompted to reflect on their own adolescent

challenges with empathy, indicating that the bias is at least partially adjustable and context-dependent (Proctor *et al.* 2020). The findings have significant implications for intergenerational communication, educational policy, and mental health interventions, as inflated perceptions of youth decline may result in excessively punitive disciplinary measures, decreased institutional trust, and weakened support for adolescent development programs (Proctor *et al.* 2020). Proctor *et al.* (2020) ultimately assert that the KTD effect operates as a self-sustaining social narrative, fulfilling adults' desire for generational uniqueness and existential significance, even at the expense of distorting empirical reality and hindering productive discourse among age groups. Ultimately, the conviction in juvenile decline reveals more about adult cognitive biases and memory reconstruction than about any actual loss in the moral integrity of younger generations (Proctor *et al.* 2020).

Modern Reasons of the Mediation Shortcoming

Generational bias is a well-documented cognitive prejudice, but modern child-rearing conditions have combined to create a severe deficit of opportunity for children to develop conflict resolution skills, leading to a mediation deficit with concrete behavioral ramifications. The impairment is derived from three interrelated domains: developmental, family and societal.

Developmental Precursors: Metacognitive Limitations and Internal Dissonance

Children are born with immature metacognitive skills, hence tend to overestimate their knowledge and social skills, similar to the Dunning-Kruger effect (Dunning, 2011). If the child's inflated self-assessment is contradicted by external feedback, this generates great internal turmoil, with consequent dissatisfaction, confusion and emotional instability. This internal conflict often manifests as anger, defiance, or perceived impoliteness because of the absence of age-appropriate emotional vocabulary and self-regulation skills, which are crucial features of peer mediation and Social-Emotional Learning

(SEL) programs (Greenberg *et al.* 2017). What looks like arrogance is better viewed as a developmental deficit in capacities to handle internal cognitive dissonance.

Familial Configurations: The "Six-Pocket Syndrome" and Parental Overestimation

The emergence of prosperous, metropolitan nuclear families has led to what developmental scholars refer to as the "six-pocket syndrome," in which a solitary child becomes the center of attention for two parents and four grandparents. In this caring arrangement, disagreements are often anticipated or addressed by enthusiastic adults on behalf of the child, so systematically denying the youngster genuine opportunities to cultivate independent external conflict resolution skills. This protective dynamic is exacerbated by "parental overvaluation," a pattern in which children are continually affirmed as extraordinary and superior to their classmates. Empirical research by Brummelman *et al.* (2015) establishes that this overvaluation, unlike healthy parental warmth, is a significant predictor of childhood narcissistic traits, promoting increased entitlement and less empathetic ability. As a result, when these youngsters face peer conflicts, they exhibit deficiencies in the humility needed for compromise and the negotiation skills essential for constructive resolution, leading to increased social tension.

Societal Transformations: The Diminution of Extended Families and Natural Mediation

The historical shift from joint or extended family structures to nuclear family arrangements signifies a significant decline in "social capital" for children (Putnam, 2000). In joint families, children were constant onlookers of the interpersonal dynamics and informal mediation procedures undertaken by grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives, so obtaining implicit, continuous training in dispute resolution and relational bargaining. Comparative empirical study shows that children from mixed family settings have far higher levels of social support and quality of life than children from nuclear homes (Kumar & Sharma, 2020). By

contrast, children in nuclear homes with time-pressed parents and few adult role models have far less opportunities to see, rehearse, and absorb ways for resolving conflicts, thus compounding the mediation deficit over the generations.

Concept of Peer Mediation

Peer mediation is a specific application of the general concept of mediation in the school and youth context. School-aged teenagers are trained to be mediators to help their peers resolve conflicts.

CHARACTERISTICS

Peer-Based Facilitation

The distinguishing characteristic of peer mediation is that the mediators are students or young individuals, as opposed to adults or professional mediators. The Allo-Tolerance educational resource (n.d.) underscores the importance of this peer dynamic: "The involvement of another student in mediating the resolution process predisposes the parties to be more receptive to listening and more motivated to resolve the issue." This resource elucidates that "if an adult (teacher or educator) were to facilitate the mediation process, that individual would assume a position of superiority relative to the students engaged in the conflict," potentially influencing the parties' "initial predisposition and readiness to seek resolutions."

Structured Process

Peer mediation follows a structured process similar to adult mediation but adapted for young people. Allo-Tolerance has a five-step approach outlined in the resource:

- ⊙ Step 1 is an explanation of the rules and acceptance of the mediation process when the mediator explains the process and checks the willingness of the parties to participate.
- ⊙ Step 2 is where both sides provide testimonies and the mediator asks each party how they feel about the conflict.
- ⊙ Step 3 is about clarifying the dispute focusing on identifying interests and promoting viewpoint taking.
- ⊙ Step 4: Proposing solutions, in which the mediator asks the parties how the problem can be addressed.
- ⊙ Step 5: Write an agreement for both the parties and to follow up the proceedings.

Social work intervention and Peer mediation

Social work intervention and peer mediation can go hand-in-hand to promote conflict resolution, social inclusion and also overall psychosocial wellbeing of children. Social work intervention means providing professional guidance, advocacy and support services and peer mediation can uplift anybody to resolve conflicts in a constructive manner with the help of effective communication without misunderstanding and also foster mutual understanding. Within communities and also in educational institutions, with the collaboration of social work intervention and peer mediation, a positive environment can be created where there is peace instead of prolonged conflicts and as a result which will lead to collective well-being.

For example, in a school setting, a social worker can identify the group of students who are experiencing bullying and provide them counselling and side by side trained peer mediators can help to facilitate dialogue between them to resolve the conflict peacefully.

Overcoming Internal Conflicts

Numerous skills like empathy, neutrality, understanding other's feelings, good and effective communication skills, the ability look at other's point of view, saying "we" statements rather than "I" etc are also the learning outcomes of mediation training. This kind of skills not only helps in resolving external conflicts but are equally beneficial to overcome internal conflicts that goes on in the mind. Afterall, mindset is crucial, a good and positive mindset means overall holistic development. Anger, frustration, stress, disagreements, mind and heart always in conflict with one another are some of

the internal conflicts that can be resolved through mediation skills before it turns out to be outbursts of feelings in a negative manner. The ability to control the one's feelings and self-reflecting the feelings is very crucial. The ability to develop healthy relationship with other peer members is only possible with holistic outer and inner world in alignment.

Resolving Conflicts Outside

The peer mediation process not only helps with internal conflict, but it also clearly explains how to solve external conflict using a range of helpful communication skills, such as active listening, understanding other people's points of view, and working together to come up with solutions that are good for everyone (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Instead of cognitive, interest-based negotiation, these planned tactics use basic fight-or-flight responses like insults, defensive posture, or physical violence. Kids can learn these skills by practicing them over and over in supervised settings. They can then use them in unsupervised peer relationships, which lowers the number and severity of conflicts between people (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

The COVID-19 pandemic as an aggravating factor

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified the pre-existing mediation deficit by enforcing extended durations of social isolation, during which children were systematically denied regular peer interactions vital for the development and reinforcement of social skills. The deficit was compounded by the concurrent rise in screen-based media consumption, as digital platforms often replicate maladaptive conflict resolution strategies such as trolling, cyberbullying, and dismissive communication, while not providing the corrective feedback that is inherent in face-to-face exchanges (Singh *et al.* 2020). The disruptions of the epidemic make the implementation of formal, structured peer mediation therapy not only beneficial, but urgently necessary, to restore reduced social-emotional competencies.

Corporal Punishment: An Effective alternative?

Corporal punishment runs counter to the constructive principles of peer mediation and has been strongly linked to a variety of negative developmental outcomes, including increased externalizing aggression, antisocial behavior, and mental health problems, in extensive meta-analyses (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Corporal punishment is an example of the application of physical force as an appropriate form of conflict resolution, which clearly contradicts the basic principles of mediation, in particular, communication, mutual understanding and voluntary agreement. This paradigm encourages a cycle of violence as children exposed to punitive discipline tend to use aggressive strategies with their peers, encouraging the very behaviors adults seek to suppress (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Peer mediation is supported by empirical data as a successful intervention and scientifically supported, developmentally appropriate alternative to punitive approaches.

SUMMARY AND SUGGESTIONS

The enduring assertion that "children these days" are more rude, entitled, or disobedient exemplifies a persistent cognitive illusion, sustained by adults' skewed memories of their own childhoods and their selective focus on negative behaviors exhibited by youngsters (Proctor *et al.* 2020). There is a mediation deficit in today's children and a lack of opportunities to grab to resolve conflicts on their own with the imbibement of the skills required to be in a peaceful environment. Family, society and also the environment where the children are exposed everyday contribute a lot in the overall development of the child. The solution to every disruptive behavior of children is not disciplinary action, punitive measures and punishment rather they shall be helped to develop the skills to function better in their day-to-day life along with social-emotional skill development.

The researcher suggested a multifaceted approach by integrating scientific knowledge and developmental best practices to resolve the mediation deficits among children.

Recommendation 1: * Curriculum integration

Schools should systematically integrate evidence-based Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and peer mediation programs into the curriculum from early childhood through adolescence. Research has found SEL interventions to significantly improve children's emotional regulation, social skills, and academic achievement, and reduce problem behaviors and classroom disruptions (Greenberg et al., 2017). Peer mediation programs provide structured opportunity for children to practice active listening, perspective-taking, and collaborative problem-solving in the presence of supervised peers (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Making these programs a required part of the curriculum, rather than a choice or an after-school activity, ensures everyone has an opportunity to participate and helps students view conflict resolution as a basic life skill.

Recommendation 2: Training for Parents and Educators

Effective intervention transcends the classroom, incorporating the fundamental developmental environments of home and school. Parents and educators ought to undergo extensive training in the tenets of authoritative parenting and teaching, which are defined by elevated warmth coupled with robust structure and explicit expectations (Baumrind, 1991), as well as in techniques for guiding children through conflicts instead of resolving issues for them. Training programs must highlight the difference between beneficial parental warmth and detrimental overvaluation, which has been recognized as a major predictor of childhood narcissism and entitlement (Brummelman et al. 2015). By providing adults with the abilities to support rather than avoid children's conflict experiences, we may establish a cohesive developmental environment that strengthens the competencies imparted in official SEL and mediation programs.

Recommendation 3: Establishing Mediation-Ready Environments

In addition to formal education, it is crucial to foster environments in households, classrooms,

and the wider community that regard conflict as a learning opportunity rather than a behavioral failure to be penalized or evaded. Additionally, schools should set up group mediation programs so that students can easily and regularly settle disagreements. As Johnson and Johnson (1996) say, peer resolution should be a normal part of schools, not something that is only done when something bad happens. Parents should also tell their kids to see fights between siblings, arguments with friends, and everyday annoyances as opportunities to learn how to be resilient, show empathy, and negotiate. For this societal shift to continue, teachers, administrators, families, and lawmakers must continue to put relational competence along with academic success at the top of their lists.

CONCLUSION

We might be able to break the cycle of generational blaming that has been a part of debate between generations for hundreds of years if we look at mediation deficiency as a whole. This can be done by incorporating curricula, adult education, and making settings that are ready for mediation. By doing this, we teach kids not only how to follow rules on the outside, but also how to develop the humility, patience, understanding, and good conversation skills that are necessary for a society where everyone works together and respects each other. It's a big job, but the proof is clear: teaching children with peaceful ways to solve problems gives them the tools to make society more fair, strong, and united.

GENERATIVE AI DECLARATION

The author(s) confirm that there was no use of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted technology for assisting in the writing or editing of the manuscript, and no images were manipulated using AI. The authors developed and verified all scientific content, data analysis, interpretation of results, and conclusions. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work presented, and no AI tool was listed as an author.

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