

Peer Education among youth

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In recent years, a modern version of peer education (it has roots back to ancient Greece) has started to take hold in many educational projects across Europe. Peer education, especially at the secondary school level, refers to an approach where young people become active, empowered players in the educational process rather than passive recipients of a set message, sometimes to the surprise of their teachers and other adults.

In such an approach, there is much more of a dialogue between equals than information transfer from a person with high status to a person with less status. Pupils become empowered to take on the responsibility of educating others. The active, collaborative learning process that the peer guides are part of is generally perceived as a very positive and formative experience. They acquire a variety of competences and skills, such as different forms of communication and presentation, as well as confidence. It also increases their awareness of their own attitudes and social responsibility. They often serve as role models for the youth they are working with.

At the same time the wider public clearly appreciates the voice and opinion of the youth.

Peer education also has many components of leadership training in it. Adopting peer education strategies in and outside the school implies that teachers assume a different role, as trainers and supervisors of a process that leads to knowledge and skill transfer from one young person to another young person.

Though peer educators usually lack the depth of knowledge that a teacher or expert may have, they are often more effective communicators when interacting with other students. Some of the key insights that have come out of research on peer education around diversity and tolerance issues include:

- Peer education is dynamic and interactive and hence engaging;
- young people share a vocabulary and have similar frames of reference;
- Young people's attitudes are influenced by the attitudes, views and behaviors of the peer group, they are more likely to model behaviors associated with such attitudes;
- Peer educators can become positive role models;
- Young people develop conflict resolution skills;
- Peer educators are seen as less distant than teachers and parents;
- Education through peers leads to increased knowledge, positive change of attitude and improved social behavior;
- Young people are more likely to be motivated by the expectations of peers;
- Young people will most likely encounter peer educators in social situations at later dates, also outside of the classroom;
- The confidence of peer educators is boosted if such strategies work; peer educators also develop leadership skills.



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