

# ALL IN EDUCATION



## *Vademecum on Peer Education*



Project number: 2024-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000256430

# VADEMECUM ON PEER EDUCATION

## The Gruppo Noi model in Apro Formazione

Author: Chiara Camia – Education expert and School Counsellor

### Foreword

This vademecum stems from the peer education experience gained in **Apro Formazione scarl**, within the School Counselling Service starting from the **Gruppo Noi** project<sup>1</sup> promoted by the **Piedmont Region to which our VET center has adhered**.

The document aims to offer a practical and reflective guide to **Peer Education**, enhancing its potential as a tool for preventing discomfort, promoting wellbeing and developing relational skills in educational and training contexts, according to the model developed within our VET center.

The text is aimed at educators, trainers, school counsellors, managers and planners involved in formal and non-formal educational contexts, at a national and European level, training bodies and schools.

### The Piedmont Region's Gruppo Noi project

#### - What it is

"Gruppo Noi" is an initiative proposed by the Public Prosecutor's Office at the Juvenile Court of Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta, shared by the Regional School Office and the Piedmont Region, presented at the Bullying Prevention Observatory Table. It is carried out in schools and training agencies, in cooperation with the police and local health authorities.

It is a **project against youth discomfort in schools where the protagonists are youngsters**.

#### - How it works

Within the school, groups of students are identified to carry out peer self-help functions in situations of distress. The groups are supported by external resources from the reference territory (local proximity network). The group, which is referred to as 'NOI' ("NOI" in Italian means WE), is made up of students who experience everyday life at school at first hand.

At the centre of the project are the students, who, supported by a reference teacher

- have already come into contact with forms of bullying or youth distress or conflict
- make themselves available to the students at their institute, offering welcome, listening, confrontation
- they present themselves to the classes to promote their function, also in view of the continuity of the project;
- they make use of the external support network that the school builds up with the police and with operators in the territorial network (asl, etc.).

#### - How it is activated

Every school year, the Regional School Office and the Region's Education Department send an information

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.regione.piemonte.it/web/temi/istruzione-formazione-lavoro/istruzione/bullismo-cyberbullismo/gruppo-noi>



## ALL IN EDUCATION

circular to schools and training agencies in Piedmont, setting up meetings in the area to present the initiative.

**Apro Formazione scarl** will join this project from the **2021/2022 training year**.

### Introduction

#### 1. What is Peer Education

**Peer Education** is an educational methodology based on the idea that **peers can support, educate and accompany each other**, sharing experiences, experiences and emotions in an authentic way.

From a pedagogical point of view, Peer Education is situated within a **socio-constructivist** paradigm<sup>2</sup>, according to which learning is not an exclusively individual process, but arises and develops within social relationships.

In this perspective, the peer group becomes a **privileged context of learning, growth and transformation**, especially during adolescence, a developmental phase in which reference to peers assumes a central role in the construction of identity.

In the school and training context, it enhances

- generational closeness,
- the common language,
- peer trust, as fundamental levers for intercepting emotional, relational and social needs that are often difficult to express in adult-centred contexts.

In adolescence, in fact, the peer group represents a fundamental space for

- the experimentation of social roles,
- the processing of emotions,
- the construction of a sense of belonging,
- the negotiation of values and meanings.

Learning itself also takes place through **modelling and social learning processes**, in which the observation of the behaviour of others encourages the acquisition of new skills.<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, the **peer educator** is not an 'expert' who transmits content, but a credible, close and recognisable **relational and behavioural model**.

#### 1.1 Peer Education as an educational methodology

Peer Education is not reduced to a set of activities, but represents a **structured methodology**, characterised by

---

<sup>2</sup> Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, 1934

<sup>3</sup> Bandura, *Social Learning Theory*, 1977



## ALL IN EDUCATION

certain distinctive elements

- **reciprocity:** the educator and the learner both grow;
- **horizontality:** relationships are less hierarchical than in traditional models;
- **active participation:** children are protagonists, not passive recipients;
- **empowerment:** resources, skills and potential already present in young people are enhanced.

Peer Education is a process that promotes personal and social competences, strengthening self-efficacy and a sense of individual and collective responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

In education and training, Peer Education is widely used in programmes for

- prevention of emotional and relational distress,
- promotion of well-being,
- combating isolation and dispersion,
- socio-affective education.

The literature shows that peer support fosters

- a greater propensity to ask for help
- a reduction in the stigma attached to discomfort,
- an earlier interception of difficulties.

As reported by the WHO (World Health Organisation), programmes based on life skills and peer support are particularly effective when they are embedded in structured educational contexts and accompanied by adult reference figures.<sup>5</sup>

This element is also central to the experience of the **Gruppo Noi in Apro Formazione**, where Peer Education is integrated with school counselling and adult supervision.

A fundamental aspect, emphasised in the literature, is that Peer Education **does not replace the adult's educational role**, but complements it.

The adult:

- provides framework, security and continuity,
- supports the group in times of difficulty,
- helps the peer educator to reflect on the experience,
- presides over the boundaries of the role.

As Luigina Mortari, a philosopher of education, states: "Educating means creating the conditions so that the other can take care of him/herself".<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Croce, Gazzinelli, *Peer Education*, FrancoAngeli, 2008

<sup>5</sup> WHO, *Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents*, 1997

<sup>6</sup> Mortari, *The practice of caring*, 2006



## ALL IN EDUCATION

In this sense, Peer Education becomes an **intentional educational space**, where care of self and other is learned through shared experience.

### 2. The Noi Group as a model of inclusive Peer Education

Apro Formazione's **Gruppo Noi** represents an example of **inclusive Peer Education**, understood not as a set of occasional interventions, but as a **structured pedagogical device**, capable of affecting individual well-being, relationships and the overall climate of the training context.

Set up in the 2021/2022 training year and gradually growing over time (from the 7 members of the first nucleus to the current 27), the Gruppo Noi is configured as a **stable space for meeting, listening and mutual help among peers**, accompanied and supervised by an adult figure with pedagogical and counselling skills.

From the outset, the project choice was to **invest in first-year students**, in view of three main factors

- the shorter duration of qualification courses (three years) compared to state school (five years);
- the intensification of internship experiences in the following years and therefore the greater difficulty for pupils to take part in meetings;
- the complex nature of the skills required for the role of peer educator, which need **time, continuity and accompaniment** to be internalised.

Peer Education is therefore conceived as a **progressive growth pathway**, not as an episodic intervention.

#### 2.1 A group "of young people for young people"

The Gruppo Noi is conceived as a group of **young people for young people**, with an explicit function of:

- **mutual self-help**,
- **prevention of** discomfort,
- **combating** dynamics of **exclusion, marginalisation** and **isolation**,
- special attention and early **detection of bullying** and **cyberbullying** situations.

Peer educators do not act as 'experts', but as **significant presences**, capable of intercepting signs of discomfort within everyday school life. Their intervention is often **discreet, silent, unspectacular**, but profoundly effective: a glance, a word, the invitation to sit beside, the creation of a relational bridge where before there was loneliness.

In this sense, the Gruppo Noi performs the function of **sentinel of well-being**, capable of grasping situations that would hardly emerge in traditional institutional channels: they observe, listen, intercept weak signals and, when necessary, **activate the adult network**.

#### 2.2 Inclusion as daily practice

The Noi Group explicitly defines itself as a **group of inclusion and not exclusion**.

Access to the group takes place through

- presentation of the project to all classes,
- voluntary membership,
- targeted invitations to students who show particular relational resources.

At the same time, the group also welcomes students who are fragile, searching, or simply wish to belong to a safe relational context. Everyone is not required to become an 'activist' in the strict sense: **belonging to the group is in itself an inclusive experience.**

This approach reflects a conception of inclusion as:

- being able to participate,
- feeling recognised,
- finding a legitimate space to speak,
- building meaningful bonds.

### 2.3 Role of peer educators and the adult network

The peer educators

- never intervene in an invasive or substitutive manner,
- act through **discreet gestures, daily relationships, constant presence**,
- accompany peers towards more structured forms of help when the situation requires it.

In the presence of complex or serious situations

- the primary reference is the **school counsellor**,
- in liaison with the **teaching staff** and management.

This model clarifies and protects the **boundaries of the role**, preventing the risk of emotional overload of the peer educators.

### 2.4 The training pact and group rules

The founding element of the Noi Group is the presence of a **shared training pact**, built around a few clear, simple and profoundly educational rules.

The rules do not have a normative or punitive function, but represent a real **safety framework** that makes openness, trust and authenticity possible.

The group rules are:

- **Confidentiality:**

*"Everything that is said within the group remains within the group and cannot be reported outside."*

This rule protects personal narrative and makes it possible to address sensitive issues without fear of exposure or judgement.

- **Non-judgement and respect:**

*"In the group everyone has the opportunity to feel free without fear of being judged. Topics are addressed seriously, without mockery or ridicule."*

The group thus becomes a protected space, where speech is recognised and respected.



## ALL IN EDUCATION

- **Consistency**

*"My behaviour, in school and out of school, must reflect the principles of the Noi Group project."*

This rule recalls the ethical dimension of the peer educator role and encourages integration between group experience and daily life.

- **Listening and speaking turns**

*"During discussions one intervenes one at a time and listens to what the other says."*

A simple rule that concretely educates on active listening and respecting the other person's time.

These rules constitute a real **deconstruction of the traditional training pact**, shifting the emphasis from control to **caring for the relational climate**.

### 2.5 Structure and continuity of meetings

The group meets **twice a month**, with a flexible but recognisable structure.

Active and experiential methodologies are favoured, enabling peer educators **to concretely train life skills** and making the group a **space for experiential learning**.

Among the most significant activities

- **Case analysis** as a form of group supervision

One of the most significant moments of the course is the shared analysis of situations intercepted by the peers:

- the group discusses the cases,
- explores possible modes of intervention,
- reflects on limits, risks and resources.

This practice has a clearly **formative and restraining** function, similar to supervision.

- **The story circle**

The *story circle* is a space for autobiographical storytelling, in which young people share particularly difficult personal experiences.

Through:

- empathic listening,
- maieutic questions posed by the counsellor,
- the broadening of the narrative,

the peer educators learn

- to stay close to the other person's pain
- not to trivialise
- to ask respectful and generative questions.

- **Work on emotions, conflicts and listening**

The course includes targeted activities on

- managing emotions



## ALL IN EDUCATION

- interpersonal conflicts,
- active listening techniques.

These skills form the **core of the life skills** needed for the role.

### - **Theatre of the Oppressed**

**Theatre of the Oppressed** sessions make it possible to

- explore complex relational dynamics,
- put oneself in the other person's shoes,
- experiment with behavioural alternatives.

Theatre language fosters a **bodily and emotional** understanding of relationships.

### - **Self-management**

At certain times, the group meets in **self-management**, to carry out activities decided autonomously, strengthening

- sense of responsibility,
- protagonism,
- belonging.

The group thus becomes a **relational gymnasium**, a protected environment in which to experiment, make mistakes, reflect and grow.

## 2.6 The role of the adult figure

A qualifying element of the model is the stable presence of a **school counsellor**, who performs a function of

- facilitation,
- emotional containment
- reflective accompaniment,
- supervision.

The approach adopted integrates

- systemic-relational counselling,
- pedagogy,
- autobiographical narration,
- analogical and symbolic languages,
- use of images, picture books and humanistic book therapy,
- maieutic and generative questions.

The adult figure does not replace the peer educators, but **guarantees the resilience of the device**, protecting both the children and the school context.

The Gruppo Noi model is strongly characterised by the stable presence of a **school counsellor** within the centre. The professional identity of the counsellor (systemic-relational and pedagogical) orients the work through

- autobiographical narration
- analogical languages,



## ALL IN EDUCATION

- images and picture books (humanistic book therapy),
- maieutic and generative questions.

This choice represents a **specificity of Apro Formazione**, the result of a conscious organisational investment, not always present in other school contexts.

### 2.7 Criticalities and limits

The main difficulties encountered concern

- the organisation of meetings,
- continuity over time,
- compatibility with internships and school commitments.

The growth of the group has also led to a **heterogeneous** composition **in terms of age and annuality**, which requires careful and flexible management.

### 2.8 A replicable model

The Gruppo Noi can be considered a **replicable model of inclusive Peer Education**, provided that

- its relational and non-performative approach is respected,
- a competent and stable adult figure is guaranteed,
- continuity over time is worked on,
- the group is recognised as an integral part of the school or training provider's educational project.

Although specific to the Apro Formazione context, the model offers **indications that can be transferred** to other national and European educational contexts, in line with the objectives of the *All in Education* project.

## 3. Concluding remarks: from model to inspiration

The experience of the Gruppo Noi was born within a specific context, crossed by precise institutional, professional and relational choices. It is not proposed as a standardised replicable model, but as a situated experience that takes shape from the encounter between real needs, available resources and educational intentionality.

Rather than offering answers or solutions, the Gruppo Noi invites us to ask ourselves how, in the various educational contexts, it is possible to create spaces for listening, responsibility and co-responsibility among peers. In this perspective, Peer Education is not just a methodology, but an educational posture that recognises in children competent subjects, capable of taking care of each other if supported by appropriate contexts.

To educate, in this sense, means to make it possible: to prepare environments in which fragility can find speech, relationship and meaning, and in which everyone can feel seen, recognised and part of a community.

An operational annex is presented below which describes, in summary form, the structure of the training aimed at the Noi Group peer educators, supporting and integrating what has been outlined in the previous chapters.

## OPERATIONAL ANNEX

### TRAINING FOR TEENAGE PEER EDUCATORS

#### GENERAL STRUCTURE

Here is the basic structure used in Apro Formazione for **experiential training for teenage peer educators** in a school context, with practical activities to develop awareness, relational skills and peer support skills.

In general, each meeting includes:

- **Ice-breaker**
- **Experiential activity**
- **Debriefing and reflection**
- **Synthesis and light tasks**

Essential features of the methodology used

- **Experiential:** starting with practical activities, simulations and games.
- **Reflective:** always debriefing and reviewing.
- **Participative:** the pupils are co-protagonists, not spectators.
- **Role-oriented:** emphasise that the peer educator *listens and accompanies*, does not replace adult figures.

The proposed structure is flexible and adaptable to the contexts, times and needs of the group.

#### MEETING 1 - Getting to know each other and building the group

- **Objectives:** create trust and a sense of belonging; present the project, its aims and characteristics
- **Activity:**
  - **Reflection on the role of the peer educator through stimulating questions:** WHO IS A PEER EDUCATOR AND WHAT DOES HE DO? WHAT IS MEANT BY PEER EDUCATION? WHAT CHARACTERISTICS SHOULD A STUDENT HAVE IN ORDER TO BECOME A PEER EDUCATOR? WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE ADVANTAGES AT SCHOOL OF USING PEER EDUCATION? DISADVANTAGES? REFLECTING ON YOUR PREVIOUS EXPERIENCES, ON WHAT OCCASIONS WOULD YOU HAVE NEEDED A PEER? WHAT FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW ARE THE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS IN WHICH STUDENTS WOULD NEED TO BE HELPED BY A PEER?
    - **Group contract:** shared brainstorming on rules, expectations and values.
- **Skills solicited:** openness, mutual listening, collaboration.

#### MEETING 2 - Who is the peer educator

- **Objectives:** to understand the role, limits and responsibilities of the peer educator.
- **Activities:**
  - **Me as a peer educator:** WHY DID I CHOOSE TO BE A PEER EDUCATOR? WHAT PERSONAL RESOURCES DO I THINK I BRING TO THE GROUP? WHAT DO I THINK I CAN LEARN? WHAT ARE MY EXPECTATIONS? WHAT ARE MY FEARS? WHAT ARE MY PREVAILING EMOTIONS?
  - **Peer educator's identity card:** first individually, then in pairs, then in groups of four and then of eight, until they reach a single large group, the children identify the characteristics that a peer educator should possess and gradually negotiate and agree on them until they arrive at a single



## ALL IN EDUCATION

common list and share it. The manifesto becomes a working track during the year to develop the skills and characteristics identified.

- **Skills solicited:** role clarity, empathy, boundary awareness.

### MEETING 3 - Emotions, emotional awareness and peer relations

- **Objectives:** to expand the emotional vocabulary; to develop awareness of one's own and others' emotions; to understand the role of emotions in relationships and the role of the peer educator
- **Activities:**
  - **Emotion card exploration:** to highlight emotional complexity and implement one's own emotional vocabulary
  - **Emotional nuances:** constructing intensity scales from basic emotions
  - Body and emotions: association between bodily sensations and emotions
  - **Reflection on non-verbal communication in relationships**
- **Skills solicited** Emotional awareness, listening to oneself and the other, empathy, effective communication, reading non-verbal signals

### MEETING 4 - Active listening and empathy

- **Objectives:** to learn effective communication techniques.
- **Activity:**
  - **The story circle:** those who feel up to it among the group members tell their story, usually episodes related to why they chose to join the group. The counsellor leading the group through maieutic questions encourages the development of the narrative. The others listen and in a non-judgmental way can ask questions at the end or share their own thoughts and emotions.
- **Skills elicited:** listening, empathy, non-judgmental communication.

### MEETING 5 - Managing conflict in peer relations

- **Objectives:** to reflect on the representation of conflict; to understand its deeper components; to develop ways of constructively reading and managing conflict in the role of peer educator.
- **Activities:**
  - **The conflict:** individual and small group brainstorming; plenary return on the vision of the emerging conflict
  - **Conflict cards:** to explore the elements of the conflict (people, pretexts, emotions, strategies); introduction to the model of the conflict as an iceberg for a deepening on the meanings and needs of the conflicting parties;
  - **Possible guided conflict management simulation with the use of Conflict Cards**
- **Skills elicited:** Conflict management, emotional awareness, empathy, active listening, ability to ask questions and read underlying needs.

### MEETING 6 - Needs in adolescence and their impact on relationships

- **Objectives:** to reflect on the basic needs of adolescents; to understand the link between unrecognised needs and relational discomfort; to develop an attentive look at one's own and others' needs in the role of peer educator.
- **Activities:**
  - **Guided brainstorming:** WHAT DOES AN ADOLESCENT NEED?
  - **Needs map - from personal to collective:** work in small groups + return in plenary; grouping similar needs and naming the families of needs

© 2025 ALL IN EDUCATION Consortium

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).



## ALL IN EDUCATION

- **From need to behaviour - reading what lies underneath:** analysis of short typical real or constructed situations
- **Linking to the peer role - circle time:** "WHAT CHANGES IN THE WAY I LOOK AT A FRIEND IF I THINK ABOUT HIS NEEDS?", "WHAT CAN A PEER DO WHEN INTERCEPTING AN UNSEEN NEED?"
- **Skills elicited:** Empathy, relational awareness, deep listening, ability to read the underlying needs of behaviour, responsibility towards the other.

### MEETING 7 - Designing peer education actions in the school

- **Objectives:** stimulate protagonism and concrete ideas; understand that the peer educator is not a "lone hero" but part of a network.
- **Activities:**
  - **World Café:** thematic tables, the students rotate and construct ideas around 5 stimulating questions: 1) "HOW CAN WE MAKE NEW STUDENTS FEEL ACCOMMODATED AND INCLUDED IN OUR SCHOOL?"; 2) "WHAT CAN A PEER EDUCATOR DO TO HELP A PARENT WHO IS LIVING IN A MOMENT OF DISABILITY OR SOLITUDE?"; 3) "WHAT ACTIVITIES OR SPACES CAN MAKE THE SCHOOL MORE SERENE AND COLLABORATIVE?"; 4) "HOW CAN WE LET OTHER STUDENTS KNOW WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO AS PEER EDUCATORS?"; 5) "HOW CAN A PEER EDUCATOR TAKE CARE OF HIM/HERSELF IN ORDER TO HELP OTHERS?"
  - **Action plan:** construction of small peer support projects to be implemented at school.
- **Skills elicited:** planning, teamwork, creativity, sense of community, shared responsibility, sending skills.

### MEETING 8 - Supervision and restitution: analysis of cases intercepted at school

- **Objectives:** to offer a space for shared reflection on the situations of discomfort intercepted; to support peer educators in their role; to develop relational and emotional reading skills of the cases.
- **Activities:**
  - **Circle time:** the training pact is recalled (confidentiality, non-judgement, listening) and the function of the meeting is clarified: **not to solve**, but to understand together.
  - **Case study:** guided narration; listening and mirroring by the group; analysis of emotions, needs and relational dynamics; reflection on the boundaries of the peer's role and on the activation of the adult network.
  - **Closure and restitution:** each participant shares a word or a thought with which they leave the meeting.
- **Skills solicited:** Active listening, empathy, reflective thinking, systemic reading of situations, awareness of the limits of one's own role.

#### Please note

Supervision accompanies the course transversally and is activated as needed, in response to situations intercepted by the peer educators.

### MEETING 9 - Self-management meeting: protagonism and co-responsibility among peers

- **Objectives:** to foster autonomy, a sense of responsibility and belonging to the group; to strengthen the protagonism of peer educators; to experiment with dynamics of self-management and shared decision-making.
- **Activities:**
  - **Self-management:** meeting organised and conducted by the peer educators on topics or activities decided by the group; peer discussion, shared planning and autonomous management of times and methods, with adult presence only for support if necessary.



## ALL IN EDUCATION

- **Skills demanded:** Autonomy, responsibility, collaboration, widespread leadership, decision-making skills, group management.

### Please note

Self-management meetings may be held several times during the peer training course and are requested by the young people themselves according to their needs.

## MEETING 10 - Theatre of the Oppressed: exploring relational dynamics through the body (optional)

- **Objectives: to** understand the dynamics of oppression and exclusion in relationships; to develop empathy and awareness of the other's point of view; to experiment with alternative ways of action and change.
- **Activities:**
  - **Theatre exercises and role-plays inspired by the Theatre of the Oppressed:** staging situations of conflict or exclusion; collective observation and reworking of the dynamics that emerge, through the body and action.
- **Skills solicited:** empathy, body awareness, reading relational dynamics, non-verbal communication, creativity and problem solving.

### Please note

The Theatre of the Oppressed sessions are optional, as they represent a plus that the young people in the Noi Group have had the opportunity to experience through other projects active in the CFP and thanks to the intervention of two educators and trainers specialised in this theatrical methodology.



© 2025 ALL IN EDUCATION Consortium

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).