



Press release

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Teachers' Lions Quest training globally effective

Research conducted in nine countries showed Lions Quest training to improve teachers' interaction skills considerably. Different teaching cultures did not influence the result. The interaction skills of even one teacher may have broad effects on the students of each country.

The research funded by Lions aimed to ensure the effectiveness of the Lions Quest program's instructor training before studying students.

The research group's earlier results had already given similar information, but the latest research with its massive scope is the most important. It will also be published internationally in scientific journals.

The multifaceted Lions Quest program aims for the overall well-being of young people: interaction skills have an important role in it.

Principle investigator Markus Talvio explains how learning these days takes place within interaction, rarely alone. According to contemporary learning psychology, a healthy person is seen as being more capable of learning.

Why are interaction skills needed in the future?

Emotion and interaction skills will in particular be needed in the working life of the future. Work will be conducted in teams, rarely alone, explains Dr Markus Talvio from the University of Helsinki, who heads the research team.

Interaction-skills training is of essential importance to the workforce of the future. Globally, the content and implementation of work in its entirety is changing and has indeed already changed, due to digitalization, says Markus Talvio.

Without in-depth development of teachers' methods of teaching, the labour market will not receive employees who can function at the level required by current developments. Interaction skills improve individuals' well-being and, hence, their capacity to learn.

The scientific head of the research project, Professor of Educational Psychology Kirsti Lonka from the University of Helsinki, considers Lions Quest training to have been a forerunner in teaching emotion and interaction skills. These skills are nowadays part of the Finnish national core curriculum, as one of seven important transversal competences to be taught.

Diverse Lions Quest in Finland for 25 years

Health, in other words, supporting healthy development and cultivating an attitude that protects against substance-abuse problems, is part of Lions Quest. Lions Quest was started 25 years ago with the aim of preventing substance abuse. The aims have broadened to cover interaction skills and other skills that support learning and well-being. The prevention of problems, hence, covers all aspects of human existence, grounded on the "healthy mind in a healthy body" principle.

In addition to the school environment, the Lions Quest program also offers training, for example, to sports coaches and other adults working in recreational activities, as they also encounter children and adolescents from different backgrounds in their work.

Learning and interaction skills are interconnected

The teachers of today must be not only intellectually competent but also socially adept. Previously, little was known about the differences in how teachers learn interaction skills. The research confirmed that teachers learn interaction skills during the usually two-day Lions Quest workshops that have been modified to suit local curricula, although the method itself stems from the US.

Next, it would be interesting to examine how teachers put their skills to practice, Markus Talvio plans. Also Kirsti Lonka emphasizes the importance of revision for keeping up one's skills.

According to Markus Talvio, the demands of this century and millennium appear intertwined with social and emotion skills. In Finland as well as in, for example, the US, educational policy has been developed increasingly to include emotion and interaction skills necessary for team work.

Massive research

Research on teachers' learning is still rare. This research succeeded in it. The research conducted by Finns was realized in nine OECD countries: from Argentina to Japan, from Finland to Australia.

The participants were over 2000 teachers, half of whom took part in the Lions Quest workshop for instructor training. The others belonged to the control group, which did not take part in training.

Unique evidence

Markus Talvio considers the research unique, as it has only rarely been possible to examine the effectiveness of a given program in a number of countries.

Now, the research could be repeated before and after training. Otherwise, it would not have been possible to examine change. The results gave surprisingly clear evidence of the benefits of the training. These were not influenced by the cultural background of the participating teachers.

Only in one country, no change was observed. For that, there was likely a positive reason: an above-average number of participants had already attended a Lions Quest course.

Markus Talvio, therefore, found scientific evidence of the effectiveness of the Lions Quest training for teachers.

Lions Quest includes similar elements as the Gordon method, in which Markus Talvio is an international expert and which was the topic of his doctoral thesis. It provided the inspiration for his interest in research.

He studied the effectiveness of the Lions Quest instructor training first in Finland, then extending the research to cover first four and now nine countries – in other words, it is massive.

Works regardless of conception of learning

– So, teachers benefit from the Lions Quest training regardless of the country. The results also show the program was also successful in being incorporated within the content of national school curricula, says Markus Talvio.

The training is effective regardless of conception of learning or value system: whether teaching is of the authoritarian, transfer-of-information type, or, for example, the Finnish-style student-centered studying.

Why are interaction skills important for learning?

Markus Talvio notes that learning takes place within interaction, and therefore developing these skills automatically increases learning. Additionally, when a student develops, they take more responsibility of their learning: ask if they don't know, work within a team, know how to listen and how to express themselves. Functioning within a group is made easier by the skills. These days, only little learning takes place alone.

Emotion and interaction skills are connected with learning, according to present learning psychology. A healthy person is seen as able to learn better.

– It is connected with setting goals for one's own life, autonomy, recognizing one's strengths and weaknesses. A healthy student seeks out company, wants to be a link in a chain.

Freedom from being stuck on an emotion

Emotion skills are needed for dealing with arising emotions hindering successful work. Emotion regulation is important, so as not to get stuck on an emotion.

When a young person learns better self-governance, they can take responsibility of their own learning. They themselves hold the keys to learning and self-development. This increases well-being, Markus Talvio explains.

Scientifically-proven efficacy

Kirsti Lonka sums up the results of the Lions Quest research as scientifically proving that teachers benefit from the training. The method was shown to work in fairly similar ways regardless of culture.

The results will be published in international scientific journals, as the research has been conducted in accordance to scientific criteria, with transparency. The University of Helsinki oversees the scientific and ethical reliability of the research.

– In accordance with contemporary data protection, nobody can be studied without their knowledge, and the participant can cease to take part at any time, without having to disclose a reason. This is not the case in all market "research", Kirsti Lonka illustrates research ethics.

– The study is not a traditional research project. It has been funded with financial support from the Lions Clubs International Foundation, the University of Helsinki participates as a collaborator, Kirsti Lonka clarifies.

Researching teachers' learning is novel

What makes the Lions Quest research special is it focuses on teachers rather than on students. This is, indeed, a new, developing field of research.

In this research, it was important first to ascertain that the Lions Quest instructor training was effective, before studying students. Studying students is, anyway, difficult in the sense that students continuously absorb stimuli from their environment. It is not, therefore, self-evident that the change in learning would always be due to the Lions Quest program.

– The research showed significant change in teachers' interaction skills. It may influence the lives of the students in each participating country. The influence of just one teacher may be broad, outlines Kirsti Lonka.

In new school curricula, teachers and students are meant to be interactive.

– It is important for teachers to grasp the idea of lifelong learning!

An adult may think they as adults have the necessary skills, but interaction skills must be learned throughout our lives. We are not "ready", even as adults, emphasizes Kirsti Lonka.

– These skills should be learned from preschool education onwards, so that by secondary school, people would know how to behave themselves, Kirsti Lonka laughs.

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Fact boxes

International Lions Quest research

Principle investigator: Markus Talvio, PhD, university lecturer, University of Helsinki, international interaction-skills trainer.

Scientific head of research: Kirsti Lonka, Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Helsinki.

Co-ordinator: Osmo Harju, Lions Quest, Finland.

- * The effectiveness of the Lions Quest training on teachers was examined.
- * Research instigated by Lions Clubs International Foundation.
- * Participants were over 2000 teachers in nine OECD countries: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, Lithuania, and Turkey.
- * Half of the participants took part in the Lions Quest instructor training, the others were in the control group. The participants answered the questions before and after training.
- * For those who participated in the training, the ability to apply skills learned in Lions Quest in practical situations increased, their experienced competence to teach contents related to the aims of Lions Quest increased, as did knowledge about the content of these aims.
- * No changes were observed in the control groups. Those who had no previous information about the Lions Quest aims benefitted most from training.

Previous research

- * The big international research was preceded by a number of other studies planned and implemented by Markus Talvio and Kirsti Lonka and co-ordinated on behalf of the Lions organization by Osmo Harju.

The first research on effectiveness was conducted in Finland in 2013-14. The aim was to test and develop a model of the training method for an international Lions Quest evaluation project. The participants were 165 Finnish teachers and a control group of 65 people, and another control group consisting of 46 people.

The next previous research began in 2015. The participants included 500 teachers from four countries and a control group of approximately two hundred people. The aim was to study teachers' learning in Lions Quest workshops.

Results and aims of the Lions Quest instructor-training research

- * The research sought scientific evidence of the effectiveness of the Lions Quest training in different countries. There was no previous scientific evidence, although the program was considered effective.
- * Benefits: scientifically-valid information for developing the workshops. Evidence to motivate the Lions membership to finance Lions Quest. It is also easier for a scientifically-studied program to receive financing from different instances, such as, e.g., the European Union.
- * The results can be used to develop teachers' Lions Quest training in different countries, so that the teachers can more effectively offer support for young people and their lives.

Fact boxes

The Lions invest in teacher training

- * The Lions Foundation of Finland invests hundreds of thousands a year in training teachers through the Lions Quest workshops. From 600 to 800 teachers participate annually.
- * The Finnish National Board of Education and Trade Union of Education recommend the training.
- * The Lions collect funds for the purpose. In many localities, the municipality or the city take part in covering the costs.
- * Teachers interested in training apply for workshops that are arranged around Finland. University staff and students also take part in instructor training. The training is considered a merit.
- * Lions Quest started from the need to bring forth healthy living. The content of the training was originally strongly linked with prevention of substance abuse and promoting health, nowadays it has broadened its scope to cover emotion and interaction skills and supporting learning to learn and well-being.

Lions Quest life skills

- * A program aimed at educators. Scientifically-studied training program. Gives teachers and educators practical tools for supporting team formation within groups of students and for practicing life skills.
- * Additional training for, e.g., sports-team coaches and other adults working within recreational activities who encounter children and adolescents from different backgrounds as part of their work.
- * The Lions Foundation of Finland has been implementing the program for 25 years.

Content areas:

1. Safe group. Positive learning atmosphere that respects diversity.
2. Self-confidence and decision-making. Strengthening self-esteem and accountability.
3. Interaction. Listening and discussion skills at home, at school, and during spare time.
4. Emotions. Emotion skills and self-regulation, and competencies necessary particularly during times of change.
5. Health. Supporting healthy development and cultivating an attitude against substance abuse.