

Evidence to show that Summerhill's safeguarding system works in practice.

Below are three cases brought to the school meeting this Spring term

1. Sally and Jean versus John and James

Background information:

Sally(aged 11) is a non-native speaker of English

Jean (aged 10.5) is a non-native speaker of English

John (aged 10.5) is a non-native speaker of English

James (aged 11.5) is a non-native speaker of English

The Case:

Since Sally and Jean are new to the school they approached a Japanese speaker (Meg) and asked her to represent them in the meeting which of course she did. Meg explained the case to the meeting which simply involved the two boys kicking on a bathroom door when the girls were having a bath.

The case was essentially straight forward. The boys tried to downplay the amount of force they used to kick the doors but they weren't believed especially when another boy spoke up as a witness to the event. Various comments on their behaviour were made by various students and two proposals were made regarding the 'fine' that should be given. It was carried that they had a 'medium job fine' which entails doing some work for the community for 40 minutes; work supervised by either an adult or a student.

Comment:

This case is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, it shows how even new, young, linguistically challenged students can access the power of the meeting / community to 'protect' them.

Secondly, as the minutes of the meeting show, the boys stopped kicking the door when the girls said they would get an ombudsman thus showing the respect that ombudsmen have within the community.

Thirdly, it could be argued that this is not really a gender related case in that it is not thought the boys did this to Sally and Jean because they were girls as they would have done it to whoever was in the baths at the time.

Afterword

Sally and Jean versus John

The Case:

Minjoo (a senior student) brought this case to the meeting on behalf of Sally and Jean. It seems that sometime after Monday's meeting case, John frightened them by

jumping out from behind a door. It is something that John does do as a joke, as he claimed, and John gave the example of him jumping out on Owen (an adult member of the community). However, the community made it very clear it was unacceptable behaviour even if it was meant as a joke:

Minjoo: 'It's not okay to scare people'

Xie-Han (aged 14): 'Stop this game.'

It was carried by the meeting that John would have a 24 hour screen ban. This means that John cannot use any screen (television, laptop etc.) for entertainment purposes for 24 hours.

Comment:

As has been said in our explanation of the meeting, 'Once the 'fine' has been 'paid', the whole community, including the perpetrator, 'moves on' and the community disapproves very strongly of any harassment, any continuation of the argument, after the case has been brought to the meeting.' The meeting did not feel John did this as a form of 'revenge' for being brought up. The meeting however made it clear to John that his action was considered stupid, insensitive and the condemnation was sufficiently strong to visibly upset him.

2. Belinda versus Horace and Paul

Background information:

Belinda (aged 13) is a non-native speaker of English.

Paul (aged 14.5) is a non-native speaker of English.

Horace (aged nearly 15) is a native speaker of English.

The case:

Belinda brought this case to the meeting. She told the meeting that Horace and Paul were saying unpleasant things about her behind her back to various people. Belinda was visibly upset and all members of the community could see and relate to the distressing nature of the experience. The two boys apologised and the community decided that they should receive a 'small job fine' which entails doing some work for the community for 20 minutes; work supervised by either an adult or a student.

Interestingly, the community was aware that other unnamed people were also partially responsible for this situation, that is, the people who received this unpleasant gossip but did nothing about it. Consequently, the community was given a strong warning to 'bring people up' (to bring the matter to the attention of the meeting) if they hear something similar again from anybody, about anybody, and not just from Horace and Paul about Belinda.

Comment:

This was an emotionally charged case which served as a useful lesson to all members of the community.

3. Annabell versus Horace

Background information:

Annabell (aged 13) is a native speaker of English

Horace (aged nearly 15) is a native speaker of English

The Case:

Annabell brought this case to the meeting. She told the meeting that Horace was making her feel uncomfortable by trying to talk about things with her that she didn't want to talk about. She repeatedly asked him to stop but he wouldn't.

The community decided in this particular case to give Horace a strong warning to stop doing something when somebody tells you to stop.

Comment:

A very interesting case because it raises 'consent' issues; the importance of giving a clear message to somebody and, more importantly, that that message ('stop') is listened to and obeyed. A good learning exercise for the whole community.