Lesson 3: Whole Education Approach

As discussed in previous chapters, bullying has various causes, characteristics, and outcomes. Therefore, understanding how to deal with bullying in educational institutions is a valuable skill for teachers and school administrators. It is crucial for teachers to be capable of managing bullying in order to fulfil their obligations of safeguarding students, preventing the escalation of bullying, offering support to victims and fostering a positive school climate. Moreover, by promoting a secure and healthy school environment, academic performance and the well-being of both students and teachers can be improved. In this chapter, we will highlight the educational approach of bullying.

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Bullying in the educational environment
- 3.3 How can teachers identify and understand bullying?
- 3.4 Intervention techniques for teachers
    - 3.4.1 ROLE PLAYING
    - 3.4.2 COOPERATIVE WORK
    - 3.4.3 PROBLEM SOLVING
    - 3.4.4 MENTORING
    - 3.4.5 THE BUDDY OPERATOR
    - 3.4.6 LIFE SKILLS
    - 3.4.7 SOCIOGRAM
- Bibliography

3.1 Introduction

Bullying in schools is a serious issue that can have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of students. It can also lead to a decrease in academic performance, increased absenteeism and decreased school safety. Schools should take a proactive approach to address bullying by implementing anti-bullying policies, providing teacher and staff training, creating a safe school environment and providing counselling and support services for students who have been affected by bullying.

Educational context of bullying and cyberbullying in schools can vary depending on the target's age and background. In European schools and educational institutes bullying can take the form of physical aggression, name-calling, exclusion and intimidation. It is often target-oriented and it has a distressing effect and negative consequences for both victim and the aggressor.

A large number of EU Member States do not have any national school bullying and violence prevention strategy. Moreover, most have no integrated focus between early school leaving and bullying prevention. Even in Member States with a national anti-bullying strategy for schools, there are a few systematic procedures to make students' voices heard in the education system. There is a need for a much stronger focus on student participation in the design of anti-bullying approaches, especially for older students. Students are often in the best position of both to prevent and stop bullying and cyberbullying incidents and other types of mistreatments. Because students see, hear and know things that teachers can't see that often, and they can intervene in ways that adults and school's management can't. They are aware when these types of incidents are occurring before adults are informed. They are the main spectators and unfortunately, participants of these incidents. These factors are placing them in the best position to effectively prevent and help combat bullying. The students have a power in setting social norms of kindness, connectivity and to create a bully-free classroom. As a response to the rising prevalence of bullying in European schools, many countries have implemented measures to address the issue.

Research that can be found in PISA 2018 has underlined that bullying in school has devastating impacts on student's health and academic achievements. All this, of course, has serious consequences for students' development and their educational performance, it also increases the risk of students leaving school prematurely and reduces their potential to live fulfilling lives.

The various types of bullying that are occuring in European schools are highlighted in the chapter 1.6 Types of bullying and cyberbullying.

A study conducted by UNESCO (2018) demonstrates that in Europe, 25% of the students were victims of physical bullying. According to this study, physical bullying is the most frequent type of bullying that is occurring in European schools. The second most frequent type of bullying is sexual bullying, followed by psychological bullying with a prevalence of 15%. Cyberbullying is becoming an increasing problem in Europe. The European Commission has been at the forefront of efforts to tackle the problem, working with Member States, schools, civil society, and the private sector to

help prevent, detect and combat cyberbullying.

3.2 Bullying in the educational environment

In chapter “1.2 The phenomenon of School based bullying” school-based bullying and general cause were discussed.

In this chapter we will have a deeper view about the bullying and the consequences it might have on the educational context and its protagonists.

“A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself.“

(Olweus, D)

https://www.youtube.com/embed/awUU9282UYM?ab_channel=SarahGraceClub

Bullying is a serious issue that affects many students in European schools and is a widespread problem that affects both the physical and emotional well-being of students. There are various reasons why bullying occurs in European schools, but one of the main reasons is due to the lack of awareness and education on the issue.

Bullying typically occurs among students, with the perpetrators often lacking social skills, experiencing low self-esteem, processing information poorly, and struggling with adjustment issues.

Olweus described the ‘aggressive personality pattern’ of bullies as a driving force behind their mean behaviour.

Bullying can take many forms, including verbal, social, physical, cyberbullying, intimidation, and discrimination. Verbal bullying involves name-calling, teasing, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, and threatening to cause harm. Social bullying includes spreading rumours, manipulating friendships, excluding someone from a group, and embarrassing someone in public. Bullying based on sexual orientation, has increased in recent years due to the conversations surrounding LGBT, economic status and peer pressure, can also contribute to bullying, because bullies might crave the attention and the desire to be perceived as brave and confident in front of the other students.

Physical bullying involves hitting, kicking, pushing, and damaging or stealing someone’s belongings.

Cyberbullying is using technology to threaten, embarrass, or harass someone. Intimidation involves using physical size or strength to intimidate someone, while discrimination is bullying someone due to their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or ability.

Good practices

1. **KiVa** - This is an evidence-based program that originated in Finland and has been adopted in several European countries. It aims to prevent and reduce bullying by promoting positive social interaction and improving the overall school climate.
2. **Respect** - This program is widely implemented in France and focuses on developing respectful behavior among students and teachers, promoting inclusion, and preventing discrimination.
3. **No Blame** - This program is popular in the UK and involves a structured approach to resolving bullying incidents without blaming anyone. It encourages students to identify and solve problems themselves, with the help of peers and teachers.
4. **Peer Support** - This program involves trained student leaders who act as peer supporters and provide emotional and practical assistance to their peers who have experienced bullying.
5. **Bullying Intervention Group** - This program is implemented in several countries, including the Netherlands and Germany, and involves a multidisciplinary team of professionals who work together to address bullying incidents and provide support to students
6. **FearNot!** is a computer program designed for children between the ages of 6 and 12. Its primary objective is to assist victims of bullying in avoiding victimization, decrease bullying incidents by reducing the number of bullies, and increase the number of defenders. The application immerses children in a virtual school environment where they witness a "physical bullying" scenario and a "relational" scenario.
7. The **ComBuS** initiative adopts a comprehensive school-wide approach to address bullying by involving students, teachers, parents, school leaders, and staff. Its primary objective is to enhance understanding of bullying in schools and implement effective strategies to combat it. Additionally, the program seeks to examine the underlying causes of bullying beyond the school environment. As such, a critical component of the program is the interdisciplinary collaboration and engagement of various stakeholders. Through this collaborative effort, the intervention aims to investigate the impact of bullying on children and young individuals and create tailored approaches to combat bullying.
8. **ENABLE** is an initiative supported by the European Union that seeks to address bullying in children's educational and leisure environments through school and center-based interventions. Its main objective is to tackle the root causes of bullying by addressing the wider culture that enables it to persist. ENABLE is grounded in the belief that if children can enhance their socio-emotional skills and develop a deeper understanding of the nature and impact of bullying, they will be less likely to engage in or tolerate bullying

behavior, more likely to intervene when witnessing bullying, and less susceptible to being victimized themselves. The project also recognizes that bullying is a systemic issue that results from a variety of individual, family, school, and community-level factors, rather than an isolated problem affecting only individual victims and bullies.

9. The objective of the **#DeleteCyberbullying** initiative was to increase awareness about the prevalence and risks of cyberbullying and to disseminate effective strategies for identifying and preventing it within schools and families. The intervention targeted children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 19, as well as their parents.
10. The **ConRed** programme is aimed at tackling the issues of cyberbullying and other emerging problems associated with the use of the internet, while also encouraging positive online behavior. Its key objectives are to enhance control over information available online, decrease the time spent on digital devices, and prevent and mitigate instances of cyberbullying.

How can European schools handle bullying?

- Create a safe and supportive environment: Schools should create an atmosphere that supports open dialogue and encourages individuals to come forward and talk about any bullying they have experienced. Schools should also provide support for students who have been bullied, such as counselling and mentoring.
- Implement a zero-tolerance policy: Schools should have a clear policy that outlines the consequences for bullying and makes it clear that bullying will not be tolerated.
- Educate students and staff: Schools should provide education on the impacts of bullying and how to prevent it. This should include training on how to handle bullying incidents, as well as teaching students to look out for their peers and report any bullying they witness.
- Encourage bystander intervention: Schools should create a culture where students feel comfortable intervening if they witness bullying. This could include introducing peer-mentoring programs to train students on how to intervene, or providing resources and support for students who want to stand up against bullying.
- Provide parents and guardians with resources: Schools should ensure that parents and guardians are aware of the resources available to support their children, as well as how to report any incidents of bullying.

It is essential to educate students and teachers about bullying and its consequences.

Teachers and school staff should have a clear understanding of the different types of bullying and how to identify and prevent them. Educational institutes should also have strict policies and procedures in place to address and resolve instances of bullying. Students should be encouraged to speak up if they or someone they know is being bullied, and they should be taught how to intervene safely to help their peers.

The bullies are often with low self-esteem. This is a main factor in the process of becoming a bully, because treating the other student as a victim will make them feel more powerful and dominant.

The peer pressure and the desire to fit in might be a good factor in the bullying process because some students bully to retain their popularity, while others act in violent or threatening ways to fit in. These students may not necessarily be aggressive, but the pressure to fit in and please the popular students may influence them to bully others. Having friends who are bullies is a risk factor, but not a guarantee that they will become aggressive. Being friends with a bully may increase the popularity of the student who is probably to adopt similar ways of thinking and acting. Students who are shy and anxious have a higher probability of being victimised if they have friends who are physically weak and/or disliked by other peers. Victimised students tend to hang out with other victimised students. Bullying has negative health consequences for both bullies and victims, and can have a negative impact on bystanders as well.

Factors of the school's bullying can be influenced by several elements. Students who are perceived to be "different "from the others have a higher risk of bullying. The key factors are presented below:

- Being different from the rest of the group
- Having a physical characteristic that is seen as "abnormal"
- Having a different religion or political views
- Having a different style of dress
- Being perceived as weaker than the rest of the group
- Having a disability
- Being overweight
- Being the new person in the group
- Being intellectually advanced
- Being socially different or shy
- Having a different sexual orientation or gender identity
- Having a different skin color or ethnicity

School bullying is affecting both girls and boys, but in different ways. According to the study conducted in 2018 by UNESCO, boys are more likely to be victims of physical bullying while the girls are more expected to face psychological bullying, along with the sexual bullying.

Going into a further detalisation on the factors that are starting the bullying episodes:

- Students who are not into social norms are at risk of bullying. This includes students who are part of LGBT community and those students who are breaking the social norms of stereotypes: masculinity and femininity.

- Physical appearance remains one of the main causes for bullying between students: this refers to race, colour, style, nationality and religion. Approximately one in four students in Europe who have been bullied report that this was based on their physical appearance
- Socio-economic status: economic and social status of the student is an important factor in the process of bullying.

Bullying can have a wide range of negative consequences for students, both in the short and long term. In the short term, students who are bullied may experience physical injuries, social and emotional distress, and academic difficulties. They may be too scared to go to school, have trouble sleeping, or suffer from a decrease in self-esteem. In the long term, they may be more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues, as well as physical health problems. Bullying can also lead to an increased risk of substance abuse and difficulty forming relationships with peers and adults. Depending on the severity of the bullying, legal consequences can include suspension, expulsion, or criminal charges. Bullying can have psychological consequences, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulty making and keeping friends

The educational consequences of bullying can be wide-reaching and long-lasting. Bullied students may have difficulty focusing on their schoolwork, resulting in lower grades and test scores. It can also lead to decreased attendance and dropping out of school altogether. Students who are bullied frequently are expected to have lower rates in schools than the students who are not bullied.

Student’s mental health and wellbeing can be severely impacted by bullying. Bullying is associated with higher rates of feeling lonely and suicidal, while students who are frequently bullied are twice as likely to have suicidal thought, creating serious mental health consequences. Victims of bullying may experience feelings of sadness, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Long-term mental health issues may include post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts, and a greater risk of developing a mental health disorder, such as depression or anxiety. Bullying can also affect an individual's ability to perform well in school or work, and can even lead to physical health issues such as headaches, stomach problems, and sleep disturbances. Active bullying has also had a significant impact on individual life, with bullying being a strong and a specific risk factor for depressive symptoms. Bully victims and bullies had a significantly higher risk for vary problems later in life such as: anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, troubles in establishing trusting relationships, and suicide attempts.

European schools have implemented a range of policies and strategies to combat bullying and promote a secure and inclusive learning environment for all students. Notable measures include the adoption of zero-tolerance policies towards bullying, which entail the strict sanctioning of all forms of bullying without exception. Prevention programs, such as workshops, peer mentoring, and student-led initiatives, have also been implemented to enhance awareness of bullying, educate students on respectful behavior, and encourage reporting of bullying incidents. Clear reporting procedures have been established for students and staff to report any incidents of bullying, with dedicated staff members responsible for investigating reports and taking appropriate action. Furthermore, schools offer counseling and support services for victims of bullying and their

families, to help them cope with the emotional and psychological impact of bullying and equip them with strategies to prevent future incidents. Collaboration with parents, local communities, and other stakeholders is another key aspect of European schools' efforts to address bullying, with parents being encouraged to participate in school-based activities and initiatives.

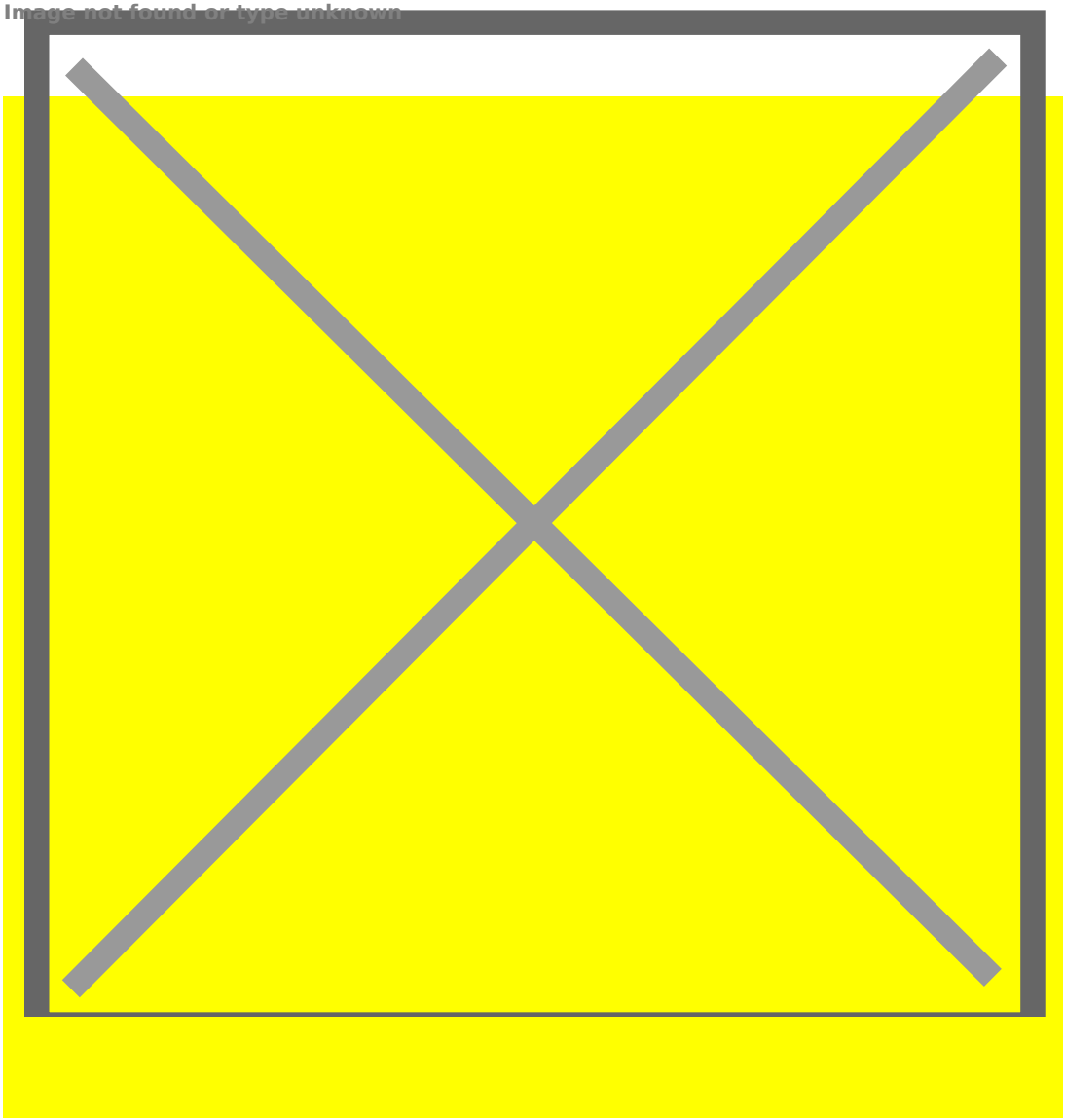
3.3 How can teachers identify and understand bullying?

Teacher’s perspective of bullying can be influenced by several factors. Indirect and direct approach of the bully and bystanders, the type of bullying (physical, sexual, psychological, cyberbullying and social) and the victim’s reaction can define a clear reaction of the school’s authorities. These factors characterise the approach and how the teachers and school’s management choose to respond to the bullying episodes. Teachers and parents need to be part of the solution and participate in the process of preventing bullying and cyberbullying. They should be aware that bullying often occurs in areas such as bathrooms, playgrounds, crowded hallways as well as via phones and computers, but bullying must be taken seriously. If teachers observe bullying behaviour in the classroom, they should intervene immediately to stop the behaviour, document the incident, and notify the appropriate school administration so the incident can be investigated. They can work with students at the class level to develop rules against bullying. Engage students in a series of formal role playing exercises and related assignments and activities. These could include showing bullies alternative methods of interaction or implementing cooperative learning activities to reduce social isolation. Increasing adult supervision at key times is another strategy to prevent bullying at school. Instead, if we are talking about cyberbullying, who’s present more than ever in our realities, teachers can specifically combat it by acknowledging the current technology. Today's youth are often referred to as *digital natives or Z generation.* Today’s youth do not know life without digital media. They use social media on a daily basis and slowly are taking over their lives. Most teachers and adults should strive to do the digital transition and to embrace the ever-changing technology. By doing the digital transition, teachers and parents can specifically

address cyberbullying by teaching digital literacy. Digital literacy is the understanding the ability to use technological tools and networks specifically to locate, research, evaluate critically, and create information. Teaching digital literacy helps students become good digital citizens and to have a critical thinking.

In this diagram it’s systematically presented the way teachers can identify if they are dealing with bullying episode:

Image not found or type unknown



After identifying the type of bullying, the protagonists of the episode, the school’s management and teachers will have to create awareness and to find proper solutions in managing bullying. Creating awareness in schools for combating bullying is mandatory because it helps to create a safe environment for all students. Will educate students on the

consequences of bullying and how to recognize it. By creating awareness and finding proper ways of intervention , schools might provide students with the tools to help prevent bullying. Awareness also encourages a culture of respect and acceptance, which can help to build a stronger school community.

Teachers have an important role and influence in recognizing and responding to the bullying episodes. If the teacher comprehends the dynamic of the situation and the main factors of the bullying, they can find an immediate solution.

In the next subchapters, methodologies on how to prevent and manage the bullying episodes will be emphasised.

3.4 Intervention techniques for teachers

As far as the bullying and cyberbullying prevention is concerned, it is necessary to reflect on the fact that it is not strictly necessary to propose so-called 'special' activities (i.e. courses that can be carried out once and for a limited period of time); in fact, there are curricular activities and teaching strategies habitually adopted by teachers that make it possible to achieve not only cognitive but also educational objectives, since, due to the way they are carried out, they foster the maturation of positive relational styles and pro-social skills in children. Therefore, such activities are the preferred prevention tool because: - involve the whole class (or children from different classes) at the same time. - can be provided with some continuity during the school year. These activities are designed to involve the whole class in the prevention intervention with a special focus on the targets and with the intention of raising awareness among those potentially positive but often indifferent and apathetic towards the fate of weaker classmates, i.e. pupils who are not directly involved in bullying episodes in the role of target or CYP engaged in bullying behaviour, but who act alongside the CYP engaged in bullying behaviour as passive supporters or indifferent observers. In fact, alongside the two main 'actors' in bullying there are individuals who are not directly involved but whose attitude of indifference encourages the perpetration of the phenomenon: these are the so-called outsiders, i.e., the 'silent majority' who, while not approving bullying behaviour tolerate it and do not intervene in defence of the target for fear of reprisals or to preserve their peace of mind. The aim is to propose activities that value peers as 'agents of change' by leveraging the positive resources of the class and the natural ability of children to feel empathy for peers in difficulty.

3.4.1 ROLE PLAYING

It is a dramatic representation of conflict situations that are relevant to the person. The characteristic feature of role playing is the assumption of a certain role, in relation to which the subject acts in the dramatic scene with a great deal of freedom in behaviour and decision-making. This technique allows individuals to test themselves in other roles, to bring out their own experiences and the emotional tension attached to them.

Here is a Role-Playing activity to propose in class:

Objectives: to promote awareness of the problem, to develop empathy and understand the target's emotions, to reflect on the responsibility of observers.

Implementation: the teacher invites the pupils to write a short text in which they recount a bullying episode they have experienced or witnessed as observers.
The texts are read out to the classmates and one is chosen to be interpreted by role playing.
The "actors" for the roles of CYP engaged in bullying behaviour, target and observer are identified among the children; the story is interpreted in strict accordance with what is written.
The actors are asked how they felt while "pretending" to be the target
or the observers:
- how did I feel?
- how would I feel if it really happened to me?

Then, the pupils can split into groups of 4-5 and try to outline a possible solution for the target to find help.
Taking turns, each group proposes the identified solution, which is immediately represented by the 'actors' to see what could happen in the various cases; the group reflects on the effectiveness or otherwise of the proposed solutions.
The discussion can be guided by the following questions:
- What does it feel like to be bullied?
- What can be the consequences for a bullied child?
- What is the most effective solution? Why?
- What should a child do if he/she is bullied?
Thorough examination of this subject: reflect on the role of observers:
- what do you feel when you see a fellow pupil being bullied?
- how do you behave? why?
- can your behaviour improve or worsen the target's situation?
- what could you do to help the target?

Variation: Repeat the same activity, assigning each pupil a different role from the one previously played, so that each pupil has the opportunity to try out the roles of target, CYP engaged in

bullying behaviour and observer.

3.4.2 COOPERATIVE WORK

Cooperation satisfies the individual's need for security and creates situations of sharing and discussion aimed at creative problem solving, improvement of the classroom climate and effective and productive learning.

Activity: cooperative learning

Objectives: learning to work together, improving peer relations, improving school performance.
Implementation: the pupils divided into groups of 4 read and learn a specific topic (history, geography, science, etc.) together. Each small group reads the text, and each pupil identifies words or concepts that they do not know and tries to understand them with the help of their peers. Taking turns, each student tries to repeat to the others what they have understood.
Variation: the pupils are divided into groups of 4/5 pupils; each group investigates a different aspect of the same topic (e.g. Lazio Region: one group investigates the physical aspect of the region, one group focuses on the region's economy, another group on its customs, etc.). Each member, with the help of his/her peers, reads and learns the topic assigned to the group. At the end of this first phase of work, mixed groups are formed. In each group, there is at least one "expert" for each topic (therefore, each group will be composed of one pupil who has studied the physical aspect, another who has studied the economy, yet another who has studied customs and traditions in depth, etc.). Each one thus becomes responsible not only for his/her own learning, but also for that of the others, since, in the new group, he/she will have to explain what he/she has previously learnt.

Suggestions

- Set a time limit to complete the activity
- Organize the space to avoid interference between the various groups
- Build small group to avoid confusion and low productivity
- If there are several CYPs engaged in bullying in the class, avoid putting them in the same group but divide them up. Pair the CYP engaged in bullying behaviour with peers who are not subject to his/her negative influence and have a good level of self-esteem and assertiveness.
- If there is a child in the class who is often bullied, avoid having him/her work in the same group as the CYP engaged in bullying behaviour, but pair him/her up with calmer classmates, with whom he or she gets along well, who can help him/her gain confidence and self-esteem
- Divide the tasks within each group to facilitate the equal participation of all.

3.4.3 PROBLEM SOLVING

It is a metacognitive technique that enables the learner to become aware of the problem.

It is divided into the following steps:

1) Problem identification and analysis:

Students are asked to set out what they see as the problems they experience within their class.

Methodology:

- They are asked to write on anonymous notes or through the development of an essay the problems experienced within the class.
- Problems may arise spontaneously during the discussion
- A ranking list of the problems identified is prepared to identify the one that students want to tackle first (preference voting).
- Examples: teasing, insults, threats, hitting, spitefulness, dealing with teachers, disrupting the lesson, damaging, or stealing personal material, exclusion from games, aggressive play, revealing personal secrets.

2) Problem definition:

Methodology:

- One way to clarify the problem is to break it down into its components, describing it in concrete and verifiable terms.
- To this end, it may be useful to identify an example situation from individual experience, trying to define it as specifically and concretely as possible (When does the problem occur? Where? When? With whom?)
- Examples: " Disruptive behaviour in the classroom " ---> general class chatter; some classmates get up from their desks and annoy
- Examples: 'disrespect among classmates ---> hitting, damaging material, teasing.

3) Identification of possible solutions

Methodology:

- Avoid negative evaluation of the ideas presented (create a non-judgemental environment)
- Take care to define the problem and the objectives you want to achieve at the beginning of the activity and whenever necessary
- Provide all participants with an opportunity to intervene

- Offer stimuli and suggestions when interruptions occur
- Problem: during breaktime, students from other classes hide material and write swear words on books.
- Solutions:
    - Analysis of handwriting.
    - Cameras.
    - Hiding a classmate.
    - Taking turns on guard duty.
    - Install an alarm system.
    - Set traps.
    - Hidden audio recorder.
    - Lock the door.
    - inform the headmistress.
    - Put up barbed wire.
    - Putting on infrared beams.
    - Hiding objects.

4) Choosing the best solution

Methodology:

- For each solution, list all possible consequences.
- Weighing up pros and cons for each solution
- Example:
    - Problem: chatting during the lesson
    - Solution: suspend the chatterers
    - Advantage: Being able to follow the lesson
    - Disadvantage: you should apply it too many times, you miss classes and fall behind, you have to do too much homework, you get yelled at by your parents.

5) Action Plan:

- Depending on the type of solution identified, the following activities can be implemented:
    - Role playing
    - Making posters reminding of the rules of behaviour identified
    - Involving the teachers
    - Appointing a supervisor

- Example:
    - Problem: being insulted
    - Solution: pretend nothing happened at all
    - Pretend that nothing happened... but how?
        - I express contempt by looking into the eyes of those who offend me and then I turn around

    - I turn away as if I had not heard
    - I give a wry smile and walk away
    - I look indifferently at those who offend me and continue doing what I was doing before

- Role play

6) Evaluation:

- Debate
- Collection of self-observations

Objectives:

- to learn to solve problems in group

- to promote prosocial behaviour

- to improve classroom climate and peer relations

- to help children to become ‘agents of change', leveraging their natural ability to help their peers

- to improve learning and school performance

3.4.4 MENTORING

Many of us have experienced in our youth a special encounter with a non-parental adult figure such as an educator, teacher, friend, neighbour, or coach, who provided a point of reference, a role model, and a strong stimulus for personal growth. We speak in this case of 'natural mentoring'. It is from these spontaneous relationships, which voluntarily bring generations together, leading to maturation through the resources present in the community, that Mentoring develops.

Mentoring is therefore a type of formal relationship, which does not arise casually but develops with a purpose of personal growth and improvement. The main tool is the mentor-mentee relationship.

From the 1980s, the discovery of the effectiveness of these relationships and their benefits led to the development of structured mentoring programmes with the main objective of reducing school dropouts. The interesting results of the first experiments and the low costs of the intervention, which was usually delivered by volunteers, allowed it to expand rapidly.

The term mentoring comes from the Greek epic sagas: Mentor was in fact Odysseus' loyal friend and when Odysseus left for the Trojan War, he placed Mentor in charge of his son. Today, in the context of prevention programmes, the term mentoring stands for:

- a special type of one-to-one relationship in which a person with specific skills and competences (the mentor) enables a young person (the mentee) to develop his/her own.
- a close personal relationship (the close relationship) in a process of working together to achieve agreed goals.
- a mutual relationship, an alliance from which both mentor and mentee benefit.

By addressing children and pre-teens whit difficulties, Mentoring seeks to prevent these from stabilising over time and becoming the basis of problems and discomfort in adolescence and adulthood.

Schools are the context in which most mentoring programmes are implemented. In schools, mentoring programmes can be an effective response, becoming a model of creative action and alternative to the traditional modes of intervention.

For Community Psychology, Mentoring is understood as an indicated prevention programme, i.e., it addresses young people who, although they do not have any overt problems, have shown some 'signs' of risk (e.g., behavioural, dropping out of school, isolation, etc.) picked up and interpreted by their parents or teachers.

At the individual level, an attempt is made to work on the individual's competences, skills, and resources, to make a person able to cope appropriately with relationships in different life contexts

and to solve problems more effectively.

3.4.5 THE BUDDY OPERATOR

The buddy operator model involves a small group of classmates actively involved in providing support and assistance to others, with tasks ranging from practical organisational activities to interventions such as emotional support, active listening and counselling.

Specifically, the tasks of this figure are:

1. organising games or other activities for the loneliest classmates during breaks in the teaching activity

2. helping classmates with greater performance difficulties to study or do their homework

3. be willing to help and listen to those who have a problem

4. standing by classmates who are rejected, isolated or attacked by others

5. to be emotionally close to classmates who are going through a particular or difficult time in their lives.

Steps for the realization of the intervention

Preliminary intervention in the classroom

This first phase serves to prepare the ground for the project both within the class in relation to other classes, teachers and parents. It is necessary to activate in-class paths of in-depth study based on cultural or topical stimuli.

It may be useful to publicise the experience by choosing a logo and a slogan for the project, in order to promote visibility towards the school.

Preparatory activities for the selection of operators

The second phase involves the selection of the children who will go on to perform the task of buddy operator. The young people are invited to nominate those who present characteristics of helpfulness, altruism, trust, listening and mediation skills. To guide the young people in their choice, preliminary activities are planned: Circle of Help, Sharing, Establishing a Helping Relationship. The final choice of the operators will be made in a balanced way between the results of the class indications, the self-nominations of the children themselves, and the teachers' evaluation.

Communicative-relational training for operators

The selected children (usually 3-4) participate in a supervisor-led training for at least 5-8 hours, possibly concentrated in one or at most two days and outside the school building.

The objectives that the training aims to achieve are:

- Developing listening skills
- Assume a correct position to communicate availability and attention
- Fostering communication in help-seekers by using open-ended questions
- Understanding each other's emotions and non-verbal signals
- Use a problem-solving approach to help the partner in difficulty.

Intervention in the classroom

The beginning of the operators' activity is a very delicate moment: it is therefore important to have a moment in which the operators themselves communicate their experiences during the training and plan together with their classmates an intervention programme for the class, emphasising that the operators have a special role, but are at the service of others and of the class group. If specific needs are identified for certain pupils, it is important that the teacher meets individually with the target pupils to confirm their consent. During the intervention phase, the buddy operators have the supervisor as their contact person, whose task is to offer opportunities for reflection and to guide them when faced with difficult situations, but also to define the limits of their activities.

The handover

The project has a pyramid structure and involves more and more pupils. It is appropriate, therefore, to rotate pupils with buddy operator tasks until the whole class is involved.

Peer mediation consists of a structured method of managing and resolving interpersonal difficulties with the help of a group of fellow mediators, usually working in pairs.

It is a model that proves to be appropriate in conflict resolution, especially when it comes to resolving difficult and persistent cases.

Since the concept of conflict is central to the understanding of this model, let us now try to explore it further.

Conflict is an inherent fact resulting from human interaction, as it is inevitable to be confronted with different opinions, desires and interests.

It is often believed that the natural consequence of conflict is aggression and worsening relationships.

Actually, this conclusion is not so obvious, as conflict resolution can be negative and destructive, but also positive, i.e. consist of an opportunity to learn more about oneself and others.

In particular, the positive outcome is consequent on the ability to modify the conflict in such a way as to allow for the evolution and transformation of relations between the parties, enabling greater rapprochement and mutual respect.

This way of dealing with conflict requires the acquisition of specific skills and competences, one of which is precisely mediation.

"Mediation is a method of conflict resolution in which the two parties have voluntary recourse to an impartial third person, the mediator, in order to reach a satisfactory agreement. Mediation is based on cooperation, as it promotes the search for a solution from which both parties, and not just one of them, can benefit.

For the mediation process to be possible, the parties must be motivated and consequently cooperate with the mediator to resolve the dispute.

The ease in having the agreement respected depends on the possibility that the proposal stems from the interlocutors themselves and is not imposed from outside, perhaps as a punishment. This implies that rules do not just arise from a dominant authority but can be agreed upon by common consent between two people, who thus make themselves protagonists and responsible for their creation and observance.

The mediation process takes place in several stages, first there is the moment of forethought, when the two mediators meet the parties separately to determine whether mediation is the most appropriate way to resolve the conflict.

That is, the parties must express their willingness to resolve the problem with the mediator's intervention and to cooperate in the process. This is also the time to help the parties to discharge emotions related to the conflict, so that they can come to the mediation with less emotional burden and more openness towards each other.

Following the one-to-one meetings, a meeting date is predefined at which the two mediators will be present as well as the two stakeholders, they are explained how to proceed in a mediation system and are then invited in turn to express their view of the incident, helping them to also express the emotions they have experienced in an obviously non-aggressive manner.

Mediators must ask questions to deepen or flesh out those aspects that are unclear. In doing so, they must remember that up to this point both parties are convinced that they are right.

After that, the parties are asked to think about a possible solution. It will be important at this stage to discuss and evaluate each proposal. If the problem is complex, it is best to start by elaborating on the simplest points, so as to give the impression of collaborative progress.

This is a way of fostering a decrease in hostility and thus come to deal with the most conflicting points with a more cooperative attitude.

Once it has been decided which of the proposals is most feasible and satisfactory to both parties, an agreement is drawn up that both parties will commit to.

Given the good communication and active listening skills required by this approach, its use is recommended especially among high school children, whereas it is more difficult to apply to contexts where the age of the children is younger.

3.4.6 LIFE SKILLS

The World Health Organisation (WHO) published the document 'Life skills education in schools' in 1993, which contains a list of all those skills (abilities, competences) that one needs to learn in order to relate to others and to cope with the problems, pressures and stresses of everyday life.

The basic idea is to help each boy or girl acquire that knowledge, those ways of being that will help him or her become a person, a citizen, a responsible worker, a participant in social life, capable of taking on roles and functions autonomously, able to cope with the vicissitudes of existence.

These are 'social and relational skills that enable young people to deal effectively with various situations; to relate with self-esteem to themselves, with confidence to others and to the wider community (from family, school, group of friends and acquaintances, to the society they belong to, etc.).

The 'core' of 'life skills' consists of the following skills and competences:

- *Decision making:* we make a good decision when we weigh up the different possibilities we have and the consequences that may follow. A decision is never good in absolute terms, but is good in relation to a specific context and oneself. A good decision takes into account the complexity of the human being, of oneself with: one's priorities, goals, strengths and weaknesses, values, culture and emotions; and the context: the people with their goals, values, needs; the relationships between people and the emotional atmosphere; the environment: objects, spaces, weather, etc. ... the culture.
- *Problem solving:* Problem solving means finding effective solutions to a problem situation keeping in mind the context and the people involved, including oneself. Effective problem solving means satisfying both rational and practical needs as well as relational and emotional ones.
- *Creative thinking*: creativity is about thinking of possible alternatives, having original ideas for solutions, getting out of difficult situations or behavioural patterns that block us. In this context, creativity becomes synonymous with: ability to find alternatives, curiosity, original ideas, variety of interests. Defined in this way, creativity is very useful in problem solving, decision making, allows one to find original alternatives in difficult situations and can be an excellent antidote to stress.
- *Critical thinking*: Critical thinking consists of being able to analyse information, situations and experiences objectively, distinguishing reality from one's own subjective impressions and prejudices; it means recognising the factors that influence one's own and others' thoughts and behaviour and for this reason it helps one to remain clear headed in making choices.
- *Effective communication*: communicating effectively means knowing how to express oneself in any situation with any interlocutor both verbally and non-verbally (facial

expressions, voice and posture), clearly and coherently with one's state of mind. Communicating effectively means ensuring that the message that I (the sender) wish to communicate to the other (the receiver) arrives in a way that can be understood, remembering that there may be 'background noise', i.e. there may be interference both external (actual noise, disturbed telephone line, etc.) and internal (emotions, thoughts that interfere with the expression and understanding of the message). Therefore, it is necessary to take into high consideration the signal I receive from the other person, the feedback, that is: listening to the words and observing facial expressions, voice, posture and words, to check if my message has arrived.

- *Interpersonal relationship skills*: it helps to relate and interact with others in a positive manner, to be able to create and maintain friendly relationships that can have a strong bearing on mental and social well-being. This ability may be expressed in terms of relationships with family members, helping to maintain an important source of social support; it may also mean being able, if appropriate, to end relationships in a constructive manner.
- *Self-awareness*: Self-awareness has to do with KNOWING YOURSELF. Being aware means being able to identify: one's strengths, one's weak areas, one's way of reacting to situations, one's preferences (e.g. in which situations am I comfortable and in which ones am I not?), one's desires, one's needs, one's emotions.

Emotional awareness is the basis for good self-awareness and consists of being able to recognise the emotional signals of one's body and to name the emotions one feels that 'inform' us about our preferences, tastes and needs.

- *Empathy*: is the ability to put oneself in the shoes of others, i.e. to recognise and share their emotions. Using empathy means understanding how the other person feels not only with your head, but also with your heart and belly. Active and interested listening is the basis for good empathy. Feeling empathy can help improve social interactions e.g. in situations of cultural or ethnic differences.
- *Managing emotions* involves recognizing emotions in ourselves and in others; being aware of how emotions influence behaviour and being able to respond to them appropriately. Managing one's emotions does not mean controlling them, but using them as tools to act, without getting overwhelmed or carried away by emotions, i.e. re-acting. Managing one's emotions makes one a master of oneself, because it allows us to remain clear headed, effective without losing one's mind: it means choosing one's behaviour, thus being intentional in our choices by assessing their effects on ourselves and others.
- *Stress management*: it consists of recognizing the sources of stress in daily life, understanding how they 'touch' us and acting to control different stress levels. Managing stress means returning to a state of psychophysical well-being, finding strategies to change the environment or ourselves, i.e.: thoughts, emotions, habitual reactions.

3.4.7 SOCIOGRAM

A useful and effective tool for analysing relationships within a class group is the sociogram. By asking pupils a few questions, it is possible to arrive at a graphic representation that highlights the position of each pupil within the group. This makes it possible to develop a greater internal balance and to help some children solve their socialisation problems.

The questions are as follows:

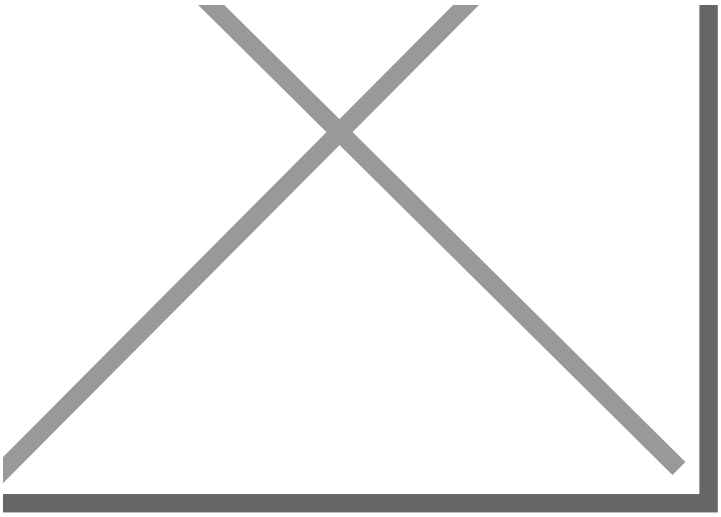
1- During break time, who would you choose to play outside in the garden? (choose two classmates)

2- During break time, who would you not choose to play outside in the garden? (choose two classmates)

3- If the teacher made you choose, who would you want with you to do a pair work? (choose two classmates)

4- If the teacher made you choose, who would you not want with you to do a pair work? (choose two classmates)

Now create a table (sociometric matrix) and a target sociogram, as in the example below.



Generally, five different positions emerge:

- ISOLATED: subject lacking any recognition by peers and therefore not in a position to establish any type of bond within the class (he/she has received neither choices nor rejections)
- MARGINAL: whose presence within the class is not fundamental. Its position is not central in the network of relationships (they received significantly fewer choices than average)
- EMARGINATED: not regarded positively by his peers (received the most rejections from his peers)
- POPULAR: is recognised by many comrades, but does not necessarily have ties (received many choices even if not reciprocated)
- LEADER: he/she is the most recognised by the group and has many bonds with his/her classmates (he/she has received many choices, most of which are reciprocated)

Starting from this breakdown, you can act to investigate the factors that create isolation and marginalisation, working to foster greater cohesion within the classroom context.

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