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.

Revision #2
Created 21 March 2023 08:56:34 by Gaia Terenzi
Updated 21 March 2023 09:20:10 by Gaia Terenzi