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# **I Teach You to Quarrel - Empathy and Mediation: Tools for Preventing Bullying**

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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## **Abstract**

Bullying is a very common, complex and important public health problem among school students. Dovigo describes the school as a place where the conflict can emerge among relational dynamics and involve students, teachers and families. Through the description of an Italian pilot project “Mediamente Bullo,” this chapter examines two tools for preventing bullying: empathy, the ability to share and understand emotional states of others, and mediation, useful to cope interpersonal conflicts. Using the mediation tool, students can learn that many forms of conflicts, including violence, can be solved by identifying the causes, discussing them and practicing nonviolent methods and behaviors. This process helps students to become more aware of positive aspects during the conflict and the power that they have in making important and positive choices. In addition, using the empathy tool, they can better understand the experience of social exclusion. In fact, several studies show that children with higher levels of empathy show less aggressive and more prosocial behaviors and they are more able to regulate their emotions. The goal of this chapter is to provide a contribution about integrated application of two important tools, mediation and empathy, in bullying among school-aged youth for future directions and intervention efforts.

**Keywords:** bullying, empathy, mediation, conflict, prosocial behavior

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## **1. Introduction**

“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” [1]. This is commonly accepted definition for bullying given by Dan Olweus, editor of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program [2]. Instead, a synthetic and effective definition is

that of Sharp and Smith [3] that speaks of “peer abuse,” that is, social relationships between friends based on power and control roles. This phenomenon is characterized by aggressive behavior repeated over time. Shelley and Swearer [4] underlined that the pioneering contribution of Olweus [5–7] has allowed to define this social problem as a subcategory of interpersonal aggression characterized by intentionality, repetition and an imbalance of power, distinguishing bullying from other forms of violence [8–17]. In detail, its characteristics are given as follows:

- **Intentionality:** Aggressive behavior is guided by the need to overwrite the other to the possibility of creating physical harm.
- **Systematicity:** Bullying becomes persecutory because it manifests itself systematically at every encounter between a victim and a persecutor.
- **Asymmetry of power:** To be classified as a bullying phenomenon, the victim is unable to defend himself or to react or seek help.

Bullying has always existed, but was once considered to be a natural manifestation of aggression experienced by young people linked to a process of growth and maturity, but today, it is known as a real social emergency. Bullying comes from a series of factors, such as culture, stereotypes, family, school, social networking, individual characteristics and ways of managing emotions and conflicts [10, 12, 18].

Offensive action can be exercised in a variety of ways: through the use of the word (offenses, teasing, threats) by resorting to physical force and contact (in these cases, it is referred to as direct bullying), talking badly about him/her with other comrades (indirect bullying) or excluding the victim from the group using social pain caused by social exclusion [20–23]. The experience of social exclusion is distressing and can induce people to feel strong negative feelings. In fact, the emotion more associated with low perceived relational value, compromised interpersonal relationship or exclusion experience is called “hurt feelings” [19]. Neuroscientists discovered that during the experience of social exclusion, the brain areas involved in this interpersonal condition are similar to those of physical pain [20–27], these results may explain why people report negative feelings and that they are “hurt” when other people devalue or excluded them.

The experience of social exclusion, even more bullying, may cause various emotional, psychological and interpersonal consequences. For example, the victim usually appears as an anxious and insecure person who suffers from poor self-esteem and tends to have a negative self-esteem. These kids at school are usually isolated and have few friends inside the classroom. The passive or submissive victim, in particular, seems incapable and insecure to react in the face of insults, has a reactive model of anxious behavior, submissive and associated with physical weakness, ability to assert themselves [28–31].

Bully is usually characterized by the use of aggression, which in some cases does not only address mates, but also parents and teachers. It has an impulsive behavior and deficit of empathy for its victims. According to Olweus, at the base of violent behavior, there is no

tendency to anxiety or poor self-esteem, on the contrary bully often has a positive image of itself [1, 2].

Passive bullies are those who participate in bullying without actively taking part and usually take on the role of gregarious, followers or sobers. Each bully is surrounded by at least two to three peoples who act as supporters. Bullying causes a series of disease that if they persist in time they can turn into dramatic situations as well. In fact, according to some researches there is a relationship between bullying and suicidal behaviors [11, 30, 31]. It seems to be many factors: the presence of self-reliant behavior during the previous year seems to be the most important predictor for the subsequent appearance of suicidal behaviors in all the groups of subjects being examined that were involved in bullying episodes (victims, bullies and persecutory victims) [11]. In addition, recent research conducted in 168 schools throughout Europe focused on the study of what appears to be the main predictor of suicidal behavior in adolescents, namely self-injury [12]. All three types of bullying considered (physical, verbal, relational) are associated with the appearance of self-reliant behavior, both casual and repetitive, and gender effects have not been significant. Research shows that there is a relationship between bullying and depression, this relationship does not have a clear direction, that is, it is still unknown if boys who are bullied are depressed, or if depressed teenagers are more likely to be bullied [30]. Summarizing, in the victim, this leads to states of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, school dropouts and suicide in the most serious cases. In the bully, there is difficulty in awareness of their behaviors due to lack of sense of guilt and empathy.

Bullying represents a social emergency not only to people directly involved (bullies and victims) but it is a problem that involves everyone, the whole society. The lack of awareness of their own emotions and the consequences of their actions and their inability to handle conflict with each other are two key points from which to start preventing. Bullying can be fought through the prevention, that is, information and training to prevent the phenomenon from arising and spreading, and intervention, that is care and support of all people involved [32].

## 2. How prevalent is bullying?

The bullying has been studied since 1973 by the Norwegian Dan Olweus and since 1991 in England by Peter K. Smith. In Italy in 1995, researchers [33–42] started researches about it and confirmed the presence of this social problem in different Italian contexts and cultural and social backgrounds. Ada Fonzi [33] reported that in Italy 41% of children attending elementary schools was victims of bullying and compared to those of other European countries, 27% in England, 20% in Canada, 15% in Spain, 6% in Finland, respectively.

The Italian National Institute for Statistics (ISTAT), the main supplier of official statistical information in Italy, published the latest bullying data [43], just over 50% of 11–17-year-olds has suffered some episode of offensive, disrespectful and/or violent by other boys or girls in the previous 12 months. A 19.8% is a victim of one of the “typical” acts of bullying,

that is, it suffers them several times a month. In total, 9.1% acts of bullying are repeated on a weekly basis. They behave repeatedly offensive, not respectful and/or violent between 11-13 years (22.5%) and 14-17 years (17.9%); females (20.9%) and males (18.8%). Among school students, high-school students are in the lead (19.4%); followed by the students of the professional institutes (18.1%) and those of the technical institutes (16%). The most common consist of bullying offenses with ugly nicknames, swearing or insults (12.1%), derision for their physical appearance and/or how to talk (6.3%), defamation (5.1%), exclusion for their own opinions (4.7%), aggression with pusher, kick, kick and punch (3.8%). A 16.9% of 11-17-year-olds have been victims of direct bullying, characterized by some relationship between the victim and the bully and 10.8% of indirect actions without physical contact. Among the girls, the difference between "direct" and "indirect" (16.7 and 14%, respectively) is minimal. In contrast, direct male forms (17%) are more than double the indirect (7.7%). Olweus [44] found that males acted more physical and direct aggressive bullying, while females were more exposed to behaviors of indirect bullying. In this way, he has traced the precise profiles of the subjects involved in this phenomenon and their roles within this social problem.

### 3. Empathy

The empathy, ability to share and understand emotional states of others, is defined as the process through which an individual understands the emotions of others by generating an isomorphic affective state and knowing that the cause of one's emotional state belong to the other person [45-49].

Empathic process does not mean to become like the other (i.e., think like him) but to be with the other, trying to fully understand the subjective experience of another person, from his point of view without assuming it as his own. Entering into resonance with the emotional state of another individual undoubtedly leads to a strong bond for sharing experiences and thoughts. Being able to understand the mind and emotional states of our conspecifics is fundamental to life, contributes to the success of social relationships because it allows us to communicate, understand and predict the behaviors and reactions of others. This ability to resonance within others' feelings allows a better understanding and the ability to promote prosocial behaviors [50].

Edith Stein, a student of Husserl, addressed the theme of empathy in a phenomenological point of view, trying to outline the characteristics of the human subject from his inter-subjectivity and relationship with other people [51].

According to researchers [45, 46], it is important to distinguish empathy from the theory of mind, sympathy or compassion and emotional contagion: (1) emotional contagion: the precursor of empathy cannot be considered as an empathic response as it does not involve emotions, but merely physiological responses to the emotional state expressed by another

person (i.e., pupil dilation); (2) empathy: the ability to understand/participate in the feelings of others; (3) theory of mind: the ability of a person to represent the mental states of others including the affective ones; (4) compassion: ability to experience feelings but not necessarily the same as being tried by another person.

Summarizing the concept of empathy is considered a multidimensional construct that represents an emotional aspect composed of two main components: *affective empathy*, ability to experience and share the emotions of others, and a cognitive trait, *cognitive empathy*, ability to understand the emotions of others. Both of them can coexist in the empathic process. Haviland and Lelwica [52] have showed behavioral evidences during ontogenetic development that demonstrated how the affective component of empathy develop before that cognitive, because for adaptive questions can be very important to experience feelings and emotions as information about what others feel [52–56].

Researchers [58, 59] described as higher level of affective empathy (i.e., share an emotional state) can predict constructive conflict resolution when encountering problems with friends and cognitive empathy (i.e., understanding emotional states of others) can predict higher reciprocity and stability in social relationships with friends. A very interesting aspect is that if it is present only cognitive empathy without the affective component can predict higher levels of bullying [60]. The lack of empathy can cause the development of problematic interpersonal behaviors.

In addition, several studies [5, 60] showed bullying intervention programs that have incorporated empathy concept as an essential element, reduce bullying behaviors in the classroom. Overall, empathy is important for preventing bullying.

## 4. Mediation

Dovigo [61] defines the school as a place where conflict can emerge very easily in which many social and dynamic relational actors are involved. At the same time, the issues involved in school context can be multiple and cover different aspects, such as organizing activities and schedules, teaching design, behavior rules, homework, and so on. In this complex social system, students undergo the pressures of the most skilled and experienced actors in social interaction, and this leads them to experience the feeling of inadequacy, especially for those who are less capable of communicating, who manifest this discomfort using inadequate behaviors (i.e., marked aggression or liability and self-closure). This aspect is combined with a widespread approach in many school contexts that considers the student exclusively as a subject that has only needs and not even ideas, emotions, proposals and therefore tends to evaluate him pliability to instructions and directions of scholar system rather than its ability to find autonomous solutions to problems. In fact, when a conflict arises, the disciplinary tool that is often applied is that of sanction in order to bring order back to class without giving students the ability to create shared and discussed rules and dynamics. Instead, the



mediation approach seeks instead to draw attention to the contribution that everyone, starting with students, can create a positive and satisfying atmosphere of cooperation for promoting general health [62]. Mediation is a concrete instrument to manage conflict and to avoid escalation. Through mediation litigants can meet themselves in front of a third person, impartial about the conflict [56]. Mediator must not judge them, interpret what they tell and give them advices: he has to welcome them, make them feel heard and lead them toward a solution. Its goal is to restore their communication and he should suggest them what to do: only litigants will be able to find the best solution possible [56]. Therefore, mediation is the best practice to face the conflict because it cares about relationship and prevents escalation to ruin it. In fact, mediation is increasingly complicated as escalation progresses. In conclusion, in mediation path, students can learn that there are many forms to react to the conflict, including violence that is certainly the least effective. Identifying the causes of the conflict, discussing them and practicing nonviolent dispute resolution methods helps students become aware of the positive aspects of the conflict, and above all of the power they have in making important and new choices.

Bertoluzzo and Bouquière [62] described in depth the concept of conflict the various ways in which one can handle it. They pointed out that the term conflict is always associated with that of resolution because the first aim is to resolve it, but they put the emphasis not on the usefulness and effectiveness of the resolution that if forced can lead to other problems but to change the prospective and to focus on the emotional aspects such as fears and suffering of the person involved in the conflict. Considering aspects such as individual sensitivity, interpersonal relationship, story, fragility can be useful for effective conflict management. One of the typical features of the conflict is the predisposition to grow. In fact, from the moment it begins, it naturally tends to convolve all energies and resources in a vortex characterized by increasing intensity, this tendency is called *escalation* [63]. It represents the process by which conflicts grow through various stages in severity over time, driven by incompatible point of views and goals; it can lead to destructive social and interpersonal dynamics. To describe this escalation mechanism, Path Pathfoort [63] used the so-called MN model. According to it, in the relationship, one of the two persons assumes superior position ( $M = \text{higher}$ ) while the other that of inferiority ( $m = \text{minor}$ ). This can be humiliated and offended and can accumulate a lot of tension that will push him/her to assume a superior position over the other. This mechanism creates a situation that tends to increase the level of aggression until it reaches a point of rupture and often to violent behaviors [62]. Often escalation has already reached such a level as to make it difficult, if not impossible, to restore the peaceful situation from which it is started. All conflicting dynamics, especially those affecting bullying, are fuelled by the inability of the main actors (victims, bullies, and observers) to recognize themselves inside or outside these dynamics.

In particular, in bullying events, mediation can represent an efficacy practice to face the conflict because it cares about relationship and prevents escalation to aggressive behaviors. In conclusion, mediation can represent a tool for preventing bullying.

## 5. The relationship between empathy and bullying

Empathy is the ability to understand and experience how another person feels [24–27, 45, 46] and bullying as a subtype of aggressive behavior in which an individual or group of individuals intentionally attacks, humiliates, and/or excludes a relatively powerless person repeatedly and over time [33–37].

During the last 30 years, it has been well established that elevated levels of empathy are associated with prosocial behavior [53]. The association between empathy and antisocial behavior has been the focus of numerous studies: empathy's affective component was measured in several ways, including story presentation, facial and gesture reactions, questionnaires. Eisenberg [59] reviewed these studies and found affective empathy was negatively associated with antisocial behavior, especially when it was detected by questionnaires. In a more recent study, Joliffe and Farrington [60] studied links between empathy, in both her affective and cognitive components and offending: they found a negative association between empathy and offending that was stronger for cognitive component. Moreover, 3 years later, this negative association between empathy and offending was confirmed, though it was stronger in studying children and adolescent, and not so obvious in studying younger children. The first study that assesses a direct link between empathy and bullying was by Endresen and Olweus (2001) who found a negative association. After that, a number of bullying intervention programs have incorporated empathy as an essential element to reduce bullying [60]. For these reasons, we have deepened the concept of bullying considering that of mediation and that of empathy strictly associated with the prosocial behavior.

## 6. An Italian example of preventing bullying: the “Mediamente Bullo” project

The “Mediamente Bullo” (“average bully”) is a pilot project for preventing bullying. It is based on two important theoretical backgrounds:

1. Morgagni's theoretical approach [64] that highlights and distinguishes the exogenous (socio-economic and cultural context) factors from endogenous (internal conditions). First, the social and cultural contexts play a very important role in establishing norms of behavior and also of social cooperation because people who break the social norms of the group may be subjected to punishment or normative sanction by other ingroup members [65–67]. It has been shown by recent studies that it is transcultural behavior [65–67]. Second, the internal condition represents a very important aspect because it considers psychological characteristic, such as personality, empathy, ability of problem solving and so on, resources useful to cope the conflict.



Morgagni [64] considered both of these aspects to be more effective. On the one hand, it can create a positive social environment by encouraging the integration of all students and avoiding the marginalization that often causes school dropouts, and on the other hand, it positively affects personal resources.

2. The concept of mediation, conceptualized as concrete instrument to manage conflict and to avoid escalation. Through mediation students can meet themselves in front of a third person, mediator, impartial about the conflict (Morineau, 2004; Morineau 2010). Mediator must not judge them, interprets the two point of views, that of the two students and what they tell and give them advices in order only students to be able to find the best solution [56].

In line with these theoretical backgrounds, the “Mediamente Bullo” project is applied in 15 lower schools, in Piedmont region of Italy. A total of 1100 students were recruited (658 males; mean age = 13.6; SD = 0.53). For each of lower school, three classrooms of third-year students were involved. Data were collected in 2017.

The aim of this project was to teach the conflict management, in particular for bullying, using their own personal energies in order to create positive interpersonal relationships among students.

The project also intends to be a response to requests of schools for bullying on three levels:

- Primary prevention: information and awareness raising on the subject.
- Secondary prevention: intervention in contexts where the phenomenon is already born.
- Tertiary prevention or intervention: treatment and care of persons involved in bullying.

This project responds to two needs for bullying, prevention and intervention. In the first step, it was possible to form all scholastic actors (students, teachers, parents etc.) about this phenomenon and its effect on interpersonal relationships. Then, in a path consisting of three meetings for each class, students and teachers have learned and experienced in class as resolving conflicts using mediation and empathy processes applying them to classroom relationships. During Mediamente Bullo, made up of three meetings that last 2 h, in the class there is a trainer (professional mediator) and the teacher who do not play an active role usually.

In detail:

### **6.1. First meeting: conflict**

After a brief introduction to the path of project, it worked on the meaning of the word conflict and the other words associated with it. In fact, the first meeting is focused on the meaning of “conflict”: kids write their ideas, then they match with their bench mate to reach an agreement. In this way, they experience what a conflict is. After that, there is a plenary discussion

in which the trainer points out importance of emotional aspects (in particular what role could anger have and begins to explain what empathy is). This leads to considerate the conflict not necessarily a negative situation but it can become a new possibility to be both winners.

## **6.2. Second meeting: before the conflict**

During the second meeting, the attention is focused on communicational aspects and through examples and stories he talks about relationships, prejudices, observation and needs. Then he highlights why it is important to know how to communicate their emotions and how to change point of view, to understand the other's emotions. At the end of the meeting, a short movie called "The Cookie Thief" is watched and discussed (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NK3WYvwbFrQ&t=43s>). This meeting focuses on the change point of view about each member of classroom group and interpersonal relationships. The aim is to discover and better understand more positive qualities of each student belonging to own classroom. The ability to know and recognize more positive aspects about others represents a very important resource for preventing and better managing the conflict. This meeting can change point of view, trying to understand and feel the others, emphatic experience. This also allows for more inclusion rather than social exclusion.

## **6.3. Third meeting: after the conflict**

The last meeting is focused on mediation: the trainer presents it as the best conflict management tool and argues highlighting emotional aspects and the role of empathy, according to previous meetings. In the last part of the meeting, through different role playing, some kids can experience himself as a mediator or as a litigant [56]. In particular, this meeting focuses on two components. The first is to develop and improve communication skills, learning this expertise can have many benefits. For example, it can help better report feelings and thoughts experienced or those of other people, and to stay in own emotions to understand those of others. Furthermore, it can mean to try not to be judgmental or biased by preconceived ideas or beliefs—instead can help to view situations and responses from the other person's perspective. The second is to represent the different way of reacting to conflicts. This meeting considers role playing and discussion of real episodes experienced in own classroom.

After the explanation of who is the mediator and his role in a conflict, students improve their skills trying to manage example of problematic situation of conflict.

In this meeting, the points are: empathy (to share and understand emotional states of others), neutrality (to identify causes, discussing them and practicing nonviolent methods and behaviors). It concludes with the graphic representation and explanation of what is and how it works, step by step, a mediation.

At the end of the path, all actors involved in this project discover different and new aspect about themselves and others. This can represent a possible tool for preventing any form of violence, in particular bullying.

To evaluate the effect of the project in each class, the level of bullying, prosocial behavior and mediation skills, two questionnaires were assessed before and after the path of three meetings.

## 6.4. Questionnaires

### 6.4.1. "My Life in School": bullying and prosocial behavior

For the assessment of score of bullying and prosocial behavior, the questionnaire "My Life in School" [68, 69] was used. This questionnaire was originally designed by Arora [65] and resumed by Sharp and Smith [8] to implement prevention actions and intervention strategies in the school context. It allows you to identify the quality and quantity of bullying and prosocial behaviors. The questionnaire composed by 39 items, which is related to different four indexes: (1) *physical bullying* (blows, punches, etc.); (2) *verbal bullying* (threats, offenses, etc.) defined as direct modes of bullying and are the most open and visible manifestations of abuse against the victim; (3) *Indirect bullying*, on the other hand, the most hidden and subtle bullying, and this is often more difficult to detect, for example, exclusion from the group and students' defamation by other students; (4) *prosocial behavior*, action, evoked by empathy, intended to help others, such as helping, sharing, donating. For rating responses, students were presented each item with question: "How often have these things happened to you at school?" Students responded using a three-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = one time, 3 = more than once).

### 6.4.2. "You and the conflict": mediation

For the assessment of mediation skills, the questionnaire "You and the conflict" (Comoglio, 1998) was used. This questionnaire identifies five scales corresponding to five different types of conflict management: (1) *Avoidant*: avoidance of conflict, renunciation of personal goals and relationship with others (e.g., "I do everything to escape the situation"); (2) *Aggressive*: imposing your solution in order to achieve your personal goals and despise the relationship (e.g., "If it's something I do not give up absolutely"); (3) *Compliant*: conflict management with gentle and friendly ways to avoid going out of an interpersonal relationship (e.g., "I'm reliable and courteous in this way I get more and with a lot"); (4) *Accommodating*: the search for compromise is not trying to pursue neither personal goals nor to preserve the relationship with others (e.g., "I am willing to give up something if he too shows the same intention"); (5) *Shopkeeper*: search for comparison both by pursuing one's own goals and by preserving the relationship (for example "I believe that neither one of them has the truth perhaps"). For rating responses, students were presented each item with question: "if I have a conflict with someone I act this way?" Students responded using a five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = a few times, 4 = frequently, 5 = always).

This pilot project was planned as descriptive and exploratory study. The questionnaire was administered to teachers in collaboration with mediators. For statistical analysis, SPSS for Windows 22.0 was used. Variables have been presented on the basis of frequency (%) for each scales. In order to test the effect of Mediamente Bullo, the Wilcoxon test were used in the data analysis to compare all scales of two questionnaires before and after the project. P-value <0.05 was considered significant.

#### 6.4.3. Pre-“MediaMente Bullo” project

For the questionnaire “My Life in School”: *physical bullying*: 80.45% never, 11.2% one time; 7.63% more than once; *verbal bullying*: 61.6% never, 11.5% one time; 26.9% more than once; *indirect bullying*: 64.3% never, 12.2% one time; 23.3% more than once; *prosocial behavior*: 31.5% never, 20.4% one time; 48.1% more than once.

For the questionnaire “You and the conflict”: 24.4% *avoidant*; 8.1% *aggressive*, 23.2% *compliant*; 18.3% *accommodating*; 23% *shopkeeper*.

#### 6.4.4. Post-“MediaMente Bullo” project

For the questionnaire “My Life in School” [68, 69]: *physical bullying*: 82.1% never; 13.2% one time; 4.7% more than once; *verbal bullying*: 80% never, 11.8% one time; 8.2% more than once; *indirect bullying*: 80.9% never, 11.3% one time; 7.8% more than once; *prosocial behavior*: 16.3% never, 23.7% one time; 60% more than once.

For the questionnaire “You and the conflict”: 16.1% *avoidant*; 4.5% *aggressive*, 22.3% *compliant*; 14.1% *accommodating*; 43% *shopkeeper*.

The general index of bullying of the sample is calculated by the average of these scales for the three bullying (physical, verbal and indirect) indices. Data analysis shows significant differences between before and after the project in bullying, mediation skills and prosocial behavior. After the evaluation of scores, distribution data did not follow a normal distribution that is, a Gaussian distribution. The main tests for the assessment of normality Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K-S) was used to investigate it. According to the available literature, nonparametric statistical tests were considered. Considering this assumption, we applied the Wilcoxon test. We found significant differences between *Pre* and *Post* “MediaMente Bullo” project in *physical bullying* ( $p < .005$ ); *verbal bullying* ( $p < .001$ ); *indirect bullying* ( $p < .01$ ); *prosocial behavior* ( $p < .05$ ); *avoidant* ( $p < .05$ ); *aggressive* ( $p < .05$ ); *shopkeeper* ( $p < .001$ ).

Descriptive results of percentages and data analysis indicate significant decrease in bullying scales (*physical bullying*; *verbal bullying*; *indirect bullying*) and increase prosocial scores and mediation skills after the path of project “MediaMente Bullo.”

These results indicate that this path, in which students have experienced empathy and mediation, can contribute to decrease phenomenon of prejudice, bullying, social exclusion for a system of inclusion.

## 7. Discussion

These results indicate that educational approach proposed in this project can represent a new cultural paradigm in the educational approach to conflicts because the attention is not on the balance that to be re-established after the dispute (resolution of conflict), but the central focus becomes the conflict itself and the goal is not to find a solution but possible solutions about it, to rediscover the relationship that has deteriorated and then to reach a shared (nonimposed)

agreement. In particular, for what concern prosocial behavior and empathy, our results are in line with the literature that show how elevated levels of empathy are associated with high scores of prosocial behavior [53]. Several studies confirm these evidences, for example it is demonstrated that children with higher levels of empathy show less aggressive and more prosocial behaviors and they are more able to regulate their emotion [57, 58]. According to this concept, several studies found that empathic response is negatively related to bullying. This importance is supported also by a recent functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) research. In fact, neuroscientists [70] discovered the role of empathy in social exclusion; social exclusion activates similar brain areas of physical pain when this is experienced personally or if it is the empathic response to another person's social exclusion. In line with these scientific evidences, empathy is a very important component, important aspect to consider for preventing bullying. In conclusion, our results confirm that empathy can represent an important role in prevention of bullying, increasing the prosocial behavior.

For what concern the mediation aspect, our results are in line with the literature. In fact, different studies describe how the mediation skills improve the conflict resolution, communication abilities, management techniques [71], coping strategies and resiliency [72]. Mediation is important for acquiring the ability to use effective coping strategies to solve problems and conflict.

Finally, the most innovative aspect of the present project "Mediamente Bullo" is undoubtedly the opening to the theme of mediation in bullying, which can become a step in the future for peer mediation, after the formation of junior mediators. The students themselves can start an experimental form of mediation, which may be repeated during the following school year. This is, more specifically, a form of conflict resolution involving the participation of impartial and non-involved students in the dispute as mediators in order to help students who are involved in finding peaceful, fair and collaborative solutions.

The purpose of peer mediation is therefore to foster the empowerment of students by helping them to strengthen their skills in successfully managing interpersonal conflicts. Another interesting aspect is the feedback received at the end of the project by the students: the greatest awareness emerged thanks to this path. We think that it is important also to underline the positiveness expressed by students during this experience, they reported that most acknowledged and methods used were useful in promoting prosocial relationships not only with their peers but also with people outside the school context. Some of them have expressed profound reflections about the value of mediation in social interpersonal interactions; others have expressed interesting links between difficult social situations and the possibility of violent behaviors.

In summary, we think that this example project, even with its limitations, can be a methodological model for verifying the effectiveness of prevention interventions for the promotion of prosocial relationships and the reduction of aggressive behavior among peers.

## 8. Conclusion

In this chapter, for the first time we examined the phenomenon of bullying, very common, complex and important public health problem among school students. Then, we described



two tools for preventing bullying. The first tool is represented by the empathy, ability to share and understand emotional states of others. This construct helps to better understand the experience of social exclusion because it allows to change point of view.

Subsequently, we explain the importance of the mediation, useful to cope interpersonal conflicts. Using the mediation tool, students can learn that many forms of conflicts, including violence, can be solved by identifying the causes, discussing them and practicing nonviolent methods and behaviors. This process helps students to become more aware of positive aspects present during the conflict and the power that they have in making important, positive and new choices. Through the description of an Italian project “Mediamente Bullo,” we examine an example of integrated application of this two tools, empathy and mediation. Results demonstrated that both of them can decrease level of bullying and thus improve the level of cooperation among students. The goal of this chapter is to provide a contribution about preventing and intervention to bullying among school-aged youth for future directions and intervention efforts.

*“I like to listen. I have learned a great deal from listening carefully. Most people never listen.” - Ernest Hemingway.*

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