



A methodological framework about quarrelling children



Erasmus+

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Introductions

**“Conflict competence is the antidote to violence.
It is not a question of learning to avoid conflicts,
but it is about learning to manage them well.”**

(Daniele Novara)

**“In conflict, the other forces me to consider him, invites me to see
another point of view other than my own, and expands my field of
understanding of the world.**

**Happiness does not depend on pleasant or unpleasant
circumstances but on our attitude towards those circumstances.”**

(Isabelle Filliozat)

Arguing at School Project at a glance

By Elena Passerini (CPP)

This is one of the results of the *Litigare a Scuola. Metodi ed esperienze per imparare dai litigi tra pari (da 2 a 18 anni)* Project. (Title in English *Arguing at School. Psycho-pedagogical Methods to help children (2-18) learn from arguing*).

In our Consortium of 10 partners, we have made conflicts an object of study and work, with precise methods and educational tools to allow students to learn through quarrels, develop relational skills, and prevent the conflictual incompetence that characterises violent behaviour.



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Schools rarely spend time and energy studying student quarrels and devising strategies for dealing with them. Many teachers react in individual and even emotional ways when confronted with arguing children. In general, teachers would prefer to see students always get along well and not argue at all.

Children quarrel. It is a universal human phenomenon

The traditional approach is to try to stop them or forbid quarrels. It doesn't work. Research by Turin University (Novara, Di Chio, 2013) shows that in kindergarten age if the adult intervenes in a corrective way, the quarrel remains frozen without any evolution in 92% of cases. It shows that when the adult does not intervene, kindergarten children often resolve the quarrel on their own. Before the experimentation of a method, Kindergarten children adopted "active renunciation" in 60% of cases and found spontaneous agreement in 33%. It shows that with the method the number of quarrels decreases more in Primary School (6-10 years) than in Kindergarten. This proves the naturalness with which children quarrel in the 3-6 years period, without any complication. The number of observed quarrels decreased by 47.7% in Primary school when teachers used the method.

The **project partners of six European countries** (Italy, Croatia, Malta, Romania, France, and Belgium) invite schools to participate in research and discussion about Arguing at Schools.

The project leader, **CPP - Psycho-pedagogical Center for Peace and Conflict Management**, is an Institute specialised in learning processes at different ages of life, with a special focus on situations of conflict. It deals with research, pedagogical consultancy, and adult training. Daniele Novara, a pedagogist and author of numerous books, is the director of the CPP. Since 1989, CPP has been helping teachers and parents discover the dimension of conflicts and disagreements as moments of human relations, clearly distinct from violence. Conflicts can be an opportunity for learning at all ages. The difference between conflict and violence is a fundamental pillar of this psychopedagogy.

In particular, for the age group from 2 to 11 years, Daniele Novara has developed a precise method called "Litigare Bene". Research made in some Italian schools with Turin University is published in Daniele Novara, Caterina Di Chio, *Litigare con metodo*, Erickson, 2013 (translated into German 2016). The CPP carries out training activities for teachers at the national level and,



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thanks to this, the *Litigare Bene* method is used in many Italian schools with very positive experiences. One of these schools is the project partner **Fondazione Intro's Montessori "Casa dei Bambini Il Sassolino"**, which has been using it since 2011.

From the analysis of the school context, there seems to be a lack of a shared pedagogical strategy of reference for teachers, which allows them to know how to intervene in the event of quarrels between peers at school, with what methods, and with what tools.

The question: "What methods are used by this school to address quarrelling students?" may seem strange to many adults, because the methods used by our project partners are still rare.

At the same time, there are consolidated and positive experiences that certify that the methods exist: the ordinary experience of a childhood quarrel can be transformed from an unexpected moment of disturbance into an opportunity to learn skills. It is about maintaining the centrality of the subjectivity of children, boys, girls, and teenagers. Methods for arguing at school guide them to develop the skills at the base of a functioning democratic life. Knowing how to express themselves, to listen, to put themselves in others' shoes, to identify common problems and interests, and to find effective ways to live better together, whether there is a shared agreement, or if there isn't any "solution" to the conflict. Life skills can be developed by allowing students to argue better, in a school context well equipped for that purpose.

There is a need to make these experiences more accessible and to understand how to make methods more transferable.

Since 2018 the partner **O.Skola Ivana Gorana Kovačića (Vrbovsko)** has used the *Litigare Bene* method with students aged 6-10. The experience with Peer mediation with students aged 11-15 is much longer. The partner **Center for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights (Osijek)** is working on Peer Mediation with many schools in Croatia, too. Peer mediation is very important but it is not common in EU schools.

The Maltese partner **Relationships are Forever Foundation** developed an original tool: the Friendship Cards, translated into 20 languages. The Maltese school partner, **Maria Regina College Naxxar Induction Hub**, uses it as a method for arguing at school and as a tool for emotional literacy education. It is complementary to the other two methods and covers the ages 6-18.



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The partners **Forum des régions européennes pour la recherche, l'éducation et la formation (FREREF)** and the **International Institute of Humanitarian Law (IIHL)** are among the founders of the *Education Inspiring Peace Laboratory*, based in Sanremo. **EIP Lab** is the hub where the project itself was born.

The Romanian partners are **Innovate4Future - Centrul pentru Solutii Educationale Avansate (I4F)** and the **Colegiul National Sfantul Sava (CNSS)**. They are working on innovation in education and they can look at the experiences made by several partners with children conflict from the perspective of a secondary school, with teenage students. An important aim of the project is to work on the entire school age from 2 to 18 years old students so that a child could find methods for arguing at schools that are different but not contradictory on their basic assumptions.

Above all, there is a need to network at a European level with the schools that want to overcome certain ineffective aspects of school life, that by inertia remain in practice when students start arguing. Sometimes teachers look at arguing students as rulebreakers. Students may fear detention/punishment related to quarrelling.

The foundation of this project is a question: **what are we talking about when we talk about conflict?**

The same question has been at the center of the work of a previous Erasmus+ Project, with 6 partners. During 2015-18 EduCATe Consortium produced many Intellectual Outputs, including a list of eleven common assumptions regarding conflict and nonviolent conflict transformation in educational settings (Annex 1). The Arguing at schools Project starts from there. "Since conflict is a learning opportunity, it should be dealt with in schools" states EduCATe. To do it, we need methods and discussions about pedagogical methods.

The questions

- **What are we talking about when we talk about conflict?**
- What happens when a quarrel occurs between students?
- How teachers look at students' conflicts?
- How do they intervene?
- To what extent is their intervention the result of a school strategy?
- Is there a pedagogical method or approach shared by teachers?



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- Who decides and what level of sharing has the choice (class, school)?
- What are the results and impact?
- Is there an educational strategy for quarreling students?
- Are parents involved in the school strategy about students' quarrels?
- Is there a kind of teacher training about conflict transformation?

The aims

- Start a wide transnational discussion on quarrels between peers in European schools and on the absence or presence of pedagogical methods to transform quarrels into learning opportunities.
- Make the documentation about methods and experiences more accessible and connected. This may help schools to choose the methods and tools they need.
- Improve student autonomy, decreasing their dependence on adults, too often asked to intervene in their quarrels as judges. This improves self-esteem and empowerment that comes from knowing about their ability to deal constructively with quarrels among peers.
- Improve the intercultural awareness at school and the inclusion of all students.
- Make clear the difference between conflict and violence, which require appropriate and different methods, in order to use conflicts for learning and to stop violence.



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Our plan

This Methodological framework is the result of the first two years of common work made by the 10 partners and validated in Multiplier Events in Malta (15th November 2022), and in Bucharest with the Toolkit for Teachers (12th May 2023).

It is divided into these parts:

1. General introduction to the problems from different perspectives and bibliographies, and overviews of the common work. A proposal of common general assumptions concludes this part.
2. Description of the main methods for arguing at schools with examples and a synthesis of their similarities, differences, and long-term impacts. Original videos have been made by some school partners, as a documentation of innovative experiences. These and other videos and documentation about the methods are collected into this [multimedia document](#), used in Multiplier Events and Dissemination Events since November 2022 bis the end of 2024. We started from our expertise, with three well-known methods within our Consortium:
 - Daniele Novara's **Litigare Bene** Method (by CPP, used in schools: Fondazione Intro (Casa dei Bambini il Sassolino di Gavardo – BS) and Osnovna Škola Ivana Gorana Kovačića Vrbovsko;
 - **Friendship cards** (by RAFF, used in Maria Regina College and other schools in Malta);
 - **Peer mediation** (by CPO, used in Skola Ivana Gorana Kovačića and many schools in Croatia and other countries).
3. Recommendations for schools
4. References
5. Annexes



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Conflict, violence and war in schools

By Maria Gratiela Ianos (I4F)

Conflict, violence and war, in the context of schools, can be interpreted as different levels and manifestations of aggression and dissension between students, teachers and other stakeholders in the school environment (Smith & Brain, 2000).

Interpreting and managing conflict in the educational environment requires not only a comprehensive but also a differentiated approach, given the complexity and diversity of human relationships and interactions in this context.

In schools, **conflict** can be seen as disagreement or tension between students, between students and teachers, or between teachers (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). It is a natural and inevitable phenomenon in a space where different individuals interact with different values, opinions and needs. If managed appropriately, conflict can lead to dispute resolution, mutual understanding and personal development (Deutsch, 1973). In an educational context, conflict does not necessarily involve aggression or violence, and can serve as a tool for learning and growth (Galtung, 1969).

Violence in schools refers to manifestations of physical, verbal, psychological or online aggression (cyberbullying) between students or between students and teachers (Olweus, 2003). It can have severe and long-lasting repercussions on the psychological and emotional development of young people (Juvonen & Graham, 2001), creating a toxic and unsafe educational environment (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Combating violence in schools requires the implementation of strict and consistent policies, dedicated bullying prevention education, and the development of victim support programs (Smith et al., 2004). Thus, it is fundamental to promote a safe and supportive learning environment for all students, where respect and empathy are core values (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011).

The term "**war**" in the school context is rarely used and does not denote armed conflict, but signifies prolonged and intense conflicts that may occur between different groups of students, or between students and school administration (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). This symbolic "warfare" can involve disputes over power, control, recognition, and respect, with profound impacts on school culture and climate (Thapa et al., 2013). Thus,



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these internal symbolic battles can change the dynamics and interactions within the educational institution, affecting both interpersonal relationships and learning (Cohen et al., 2009). It is essential that teachers and administration address these conflicts in a constructive way, promoting reconciliation and mutual respect (Gorton & Alston, 2019).

While conflict in schools is inevitable and can be constructive, it is crucial to prevent and manage violence and symbolic "wars" to ensure a safe and conducive learning environment in schools. Education, mediation, psychological support and community involvement are key elements in building a positive school environment and resolving conflict peacefully and constructively.

Violence prevention at institutional level

Preventing violence in schools is key to creating a safe and positive learning environment for all students. Violence, including bullying and other forms of aggressive behaviour, can have profoundly negative effects on children's cognitive, emotional and social development. It is therefore vital to tackle this problem through a multi-stakeholder and integrated approach.

Education and awareness-raising are the foundation of school violence prevention strategies (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Social-emotional education programs and workshops on empathy and mutual respect are essential tools to encourage students to appreciate diversity and respect individual differences (Durlak et al., 2011). By providing detailed lessons about the repercussions and consequences of violence, students can become more aware of the importance of adopting respectful and non-violent behaviour (Greenberg et al., 2003).

Thus, a curriculum that combines formal education with personal and social development can contribute significantly to building a school environment in which students feel safe, respected and valued, thereby minimising the risk of violence and aggression among students (Elias, 1997).

Early Identification and Intervention Strategies. Identifying early signs of aggressive behaviour and recognizing students who are at increased risk of exhibiting violent behaviour are crucial (Walker et al., 2004). Implementing early identification and intervention strategies can contribute significantly to the prevention and effective management of violence in schools (Greenberg et al., 2003). Regular psychological assessments and prompt interventions, such as counseling and emotional support, can prevent



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violent situations from escalating and provide needed assistance to both victims and perpetrators (Rones & Hoagwood, 2000). These proactive approaches allow problems to be identified and addressed at an early stage, providing support tailored to the individual needs of students (Hoagwood et al., 2007). By implementing and maintaining such strategies, schools can create a safer and more supportive environment that fosters students' academic and personal development while reducing the risk of violent and aggressive displays (Doll et al., 2010).

Creating a Safe School Environment. To prevent violence, it is essential to promote a safe and inclusive school environment (Astor et al., 1999). Strict policies against bullying and violence, together with appropriate security measures, can also contribute to creating a space where students feel protected and supported (Olweus, 2003).

Implementing **anti-violence policies and legislation** (Astor et al., 2004). Working closely with local authorities and advocating for the strengthening of the legislative framework can significantly contribute to creating a violence-free educational environment (Jimerson, 2012). Advocacy for stricter laws and implementation of robust policies are essential tools in ensuring safety and security in schools (Bowen & Bowen, 1999), and are a fundamental step in promoting an educational environment where students can focus on learning without fear of bullying or aggression (Espelage & Swearer, 2003).

Involving parents and the community in the development and education of children (J. L. Epstein, 2018). Establishing partnerships with community organizations and initiating community-wide programs can facilitate building a robust support network and promote the values of respect and nonviolence (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002).

Integrating these elements and collaborating with various community entities allows for the building of a cohesive educational and social environment in which children can learn and develop in a safe and supportive context (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). In addition, parent and community involvement in children's education contributes to a positive school climate and the formation of healthy social values and norms that are essential in preventing violence and aggressive behaviour in schools (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005).



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Teacher training. Education and training of teachers in conflict management and in recognizing the warning signs of violent behaviour can play a crucial role in early intervention and prevent exacerbation of conflict (Jones, 2004). Such professional training is essential to ensure a safe and supportive school environment (Ritter & Boruch, 1999).

Cyberbullying. In the context of the digital age, cyberbullying prevention has become an indispensable component of school safety (Smith et al., 2008). Digital literacy education and supervision of online behaviour are fundamental strategies to counter and prevent bullying in cyberspace (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012). By integrating digital education into the curriculum and promoting online responsibility, schools can play an active role in protecting students from the risks and dangers of cyberbullying, thus contributing to an online learning and interaction environment that is at the same time safe, respectful and inclusive (Tokunaga, 2010).

Evaluation and monitoring. Conducting regular evaluation and monitoring of the effectiveness of violence prevention strategies and adapting them according to the results achieved and the needs identified are fundamental to ensuring a safe and positive school environment (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2002). This implies a flexible and dynamic approach, adaptable to the specific context of each school and to changing needs and challenges (Gendron et al., 2011). Such a continuous process of evaluation and adjustment of the measures adopted can help to quickly identify and effectively address emerging issues, as well as optimise preventive strategies to maximise the positive impact on school climate (Bradshaw et al., 2010).

By implementing and integrating these measures, we can hope to build an educational environment that promotes respect, understanding and non-violence, where every student can learn and grow in a safe and supportive environment.

Preventing violence in schools

Preventing violence in schools is crucial to creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Teachers can adopt several techniques and strategies to combat and prevent violence in the school environment.

Promoting a Positive Learning Environment. Creating a positive and supportive learning environment can significantly reduce the chances of violence. Teachers can create an atmosphere of mutual respect and



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understanding by setting clear rules and consistency for inappropriate behaviour.

Social-Emotional Education. Implementing social-emotional education (SEL) can improve students' abilities to manage their emotions, behaviours, and interpersonal relationships (Durlak et al., 2011). Teachers can integrate SEL lessons into the curriculum, helping students become more aware and responsible. Counseling and psychological support are also essential for the students involved (Osher et al., 2010).

Proactive Strategies for Behaviour Management. Proactive behaviour management techniques, such as rewards and sanctions, can prevent aggressive and disruptive behaviours (M. Epstein et al., 2008). Teachers can set clear expectations and consequences for negative behaviours and reward positive behaviours.

Mediation and Conflict Resolution. Teachers can adopt the role of mediators in resolving conflicts between students, promoting dialogue and mutual understanding. Mediation techniques can help defuse tensions and prevent conflict from escalating.

Collaboration with Parents and Community. Parent involvement and collaboration with the local community can strengthen school violence prevention efforts (Sheras et al., 1996). Communicating effectively with parents and creating partnerships with local organizations can help strengthen a safe and supportive school environment.

Bullying Prevention Education. Educational programs focused on bullying prevention can raise students' awareness of the impact of their actions and promote empathy and respect (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Teachers can implement lessons and activities that teach students about the consequences of bullying and the importance of mutual respect.

By adopting such techniques, teachers can make a significant contribution to reducing and preventing violence in schools, creating an environment where all students feel valued, respected and safe. Ongoing training and access to appropriate resources are also key to teachers' ability to implement these strategies effectively.

Developing bullying prevention skills

Developing teachers' skills to prevent bullying, violence and conflict in schools is a key element in creating a safe and supportive learning environment. Teachers are often the first line of defence in identifying and addressing these issues, and as such require appropriate and ongoing training in these areas.



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Continuing Education and Training. In order to effectively address the issues of bullying and violence in schools, it is crucial to develop and strengthen the competencies of teachers through *initial and in-service training* (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). It is imperative that teachers receive robust initial and ongoing training in conflict management and bullying prevention, as well as early intervention (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). This training can help equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively identify and address violent and disruptive behaviours in school settings. *Organising workshops and seminars* can improve teachers' ability to manage disruptive behaviours and address issues of violence (Marzano et al., 2003). Through such training programmes, teachers can acquire new and effective strategies and approaches to promote a safe and positive learning environment. Providing access to up-to-date and relevant educational resources, such as textbooks, guides and online materials, is also vital (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). These resources can provide teachers with the support and information needed to effectively address bullying and other forms of violence in schools.

Developing Empathy and Emotional Intelligence. *Learning and applying empathy techniques* are essential for teachers to effectively understand and address the needs and feelings of students (Roffey, 2012). By cultivating empathy, teachers can build closer and more positive relationships with students, thus contributing to a school climate in which every student feels valued and understood. *Emotional intelligence training* is also vital for teachers so that they can recognise and respond appropriately to their own and others' emotions (Brackett et al., 2011). Emotional intelligence not only helps to manage stressful and conflictual situations effectively, but also contributes to creating a supportive learning environment characterised by mutual respect and understanding.

Proactive Prevention Strategies. Developing bullying prevention skills relies heavily on adopting proactive strategies that facilitate an inclusive and positive school environment (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). It is essential to implement robust *anti-bullying programmes* and promote a school climate that is both positive and inclusive (Olweus, 2003). Such programmes and strategies are designed to educate students and teachers about the consequences of bullying and ways in which it can be prevented and combated. *Strong diversity and inclusion education* is also vital, as it has the power to cultivate respect and acceptance of individual differences



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(Banks, 2004). Integrating diversity and inclusion themes into the curriculum helps to build a school community based on mutual respect and understanding, where all students feel valued and accepted for who they are. *Creating a safe and supportive classroom environment* where students feel safe, valued and respected is also a central goal (Cornell & Mayer, 2010). A positive and supportive classroom environment can reduce the incidence of negative behaviours and promote the well-being and academic success of each student.

Intervention and Support. *Identifying early signs of bullying and violence* is crucial, allowing early intervention to prevent escalation (Whitney & Smith, 1993). Proactive action and rapid response is vital in managing incidents and preventing the long-term effects of bullying on victims. *Providing support and counseling* to students affected by bullying is also central to addressing this problem (Green et al., 2011). Counseling services can play a crucial role in alleviating students' distress and developing resilience and coping skills. *Collaboration with mental health professionals* is fundamental to addressing the complex needs of students (Rones & Hoagwood, 2000). Through such collaborations, schools can provide specialized support and develop tailored strategies to best respond to the issues students face.

Effective Communication and Mediation. *Developing assertive communication skills* is crucial to facilitating constructive and respectful dialogue among all members of the school community (Riggio, 1986). Effective communication can prevent misunderstandings and promote a learning environment based on mutual respect and understanding where all students feel valued and heard. The *use of mediation techniques* is also fundamental to resolving conflicts peacefully and constructively (Bercovitch & Jackson, 2009). Mediation allows the parties involved to voice their concerns and work together to find mutually satisfactory solutions, thus contributing to a harmonious school climate. *Learning and implementing methods of conflict resolution* are essential for effectively managing disputes and promoting peaceful coexistence in schools (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). These methods can help identify constructive solutions and restore damaged relationships, creating an environment conducive to learning and development.



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Community and Parent Involvement. *Close collaboration with parents* is a key element in developing and implementing joint prevention and intervention strategies (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). By working together, schools and families can build a united front against bullying and provide a consistent and supportive environment for students. *Active community involvement* in school activities can help create a climate of mutual respect and support (Sanders, 2003). Involving community members in school projects and educational activities can promote a sense of belonging and shared responsibility in improving the school climate. *Creating partnerships with local organizations* allows access to additional resources and support (Sheldon, 2003). Such collaborations can provide valuable opportunities for developing educational programs and community initiatives, thereby supporting students and families directly.

Developing teachers' skills to prevent and manage bullying, violence and conflict in schools is not only beneficial for students but also for the whole school community. Through continuous education, teachers can become effective facilitators of learning and architects of healthy, safe and inclusive school environments, thus contributing to the development of balanced, responsible and respectful individuals.



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Students in conflict

By Stephen Camilleri (RAFF)

Schools are places where children spend a lot of time and learn how to socialise with their peers and with adults. This involves making friends, working with others, exchanging ideas and resolving conflicts (Bezzina & Camilleri, 2021; Clayton, Ballif-Spanvill & Hunsaker, 2001; Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2007). Schools however rarely spend time and energy studying student quarrels and conflicts, rarely adopt strategies for dealing with student conflicts constructively and tend to deal with conflicts in a disciplinary manner.

However, students in conflict are in the process of developing and learning. Trying to take away their conflicts or taking over their conflicts would mean taking away an opportunity for them to grow and learn (Hakvoort; 2010).

Conflict resolution programmes seek to create opportunities for students and other members of the school community to recognize that conflict is a natural part of life and that different people respond differently to conflict. The programmes also seek to create a context where students feel safe to express their emotions, understand those of others and thus be able to deal with conflicts in an amicable and positive way (Bezzina & Camilleri, 2021; Clayton, Ballif-Spanvill & Hunsaker, 2001; Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2007). During conflicts emotional regulation or expression is viewed as an opportunity for students to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others and process their emotions and those of others effectively (Heydenberk & Heydenberk; 2007).

A comprehensive conflict resolution programme helps students to learn how to control their behaviour, make better choices and empower them to solve their own issues (Heydenberk, & Heydenberk, 2007; Crawford & Bodine, 1996).

The conflict pyramid

Cohen (1995/2005, 35) theoretically visualises the ideal system of conflict resolution school environments as a pyramid with four levels, conflict prevention, conflict management, third party support and, finally, stopping destructive conflicts by means of arbitration. The lines dividing the four levels are not distinct lines; none of them is 'water-proof', although meaningful when describing the dominant focus of each level.



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This system implies that when schools create a positive and democratic school climate, and a comprehensive conflict resolution programme, potential conflicts do not occur. Other conflicts that might occur would be settled by the students themselves without any intervention from adults. Those conflicts that are not resolved by students could go into mediation either by a student or a teacher. The last level of the pyramid indicates that there are conflicts that cannot be tackled by students themselves or by mediation and therefore the senior management team of the school has to intervene either through disciplinary actions or through arbitration (Cohen 1995,2005).

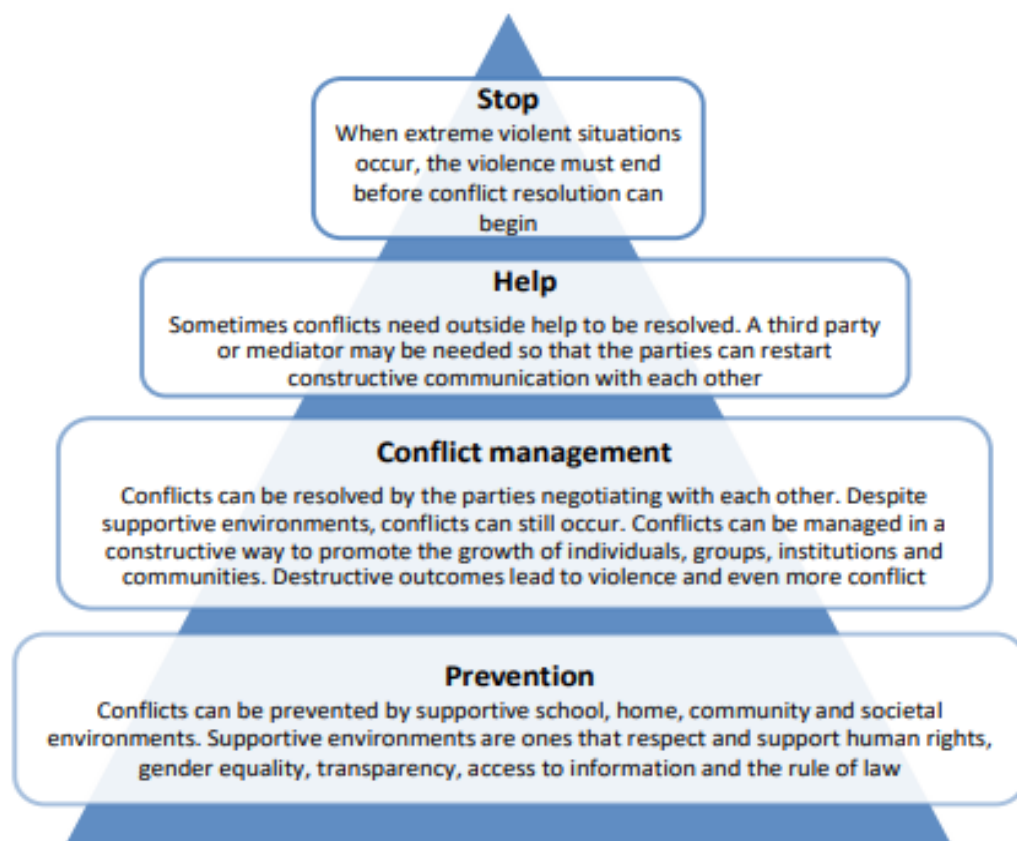


Figure 1: The conflict pyramid



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Conflict resolution processes

According to Cohen (1995,2005), there are three main conflict resolution processes: negotiation, mediation, and arbitration. These three processes build upon each other, however, as one proceeds from negotiation to arbitration, the students become less empowered. When students negotiate between themselves, they are in complete control and have to use various skills (eg. decision-making skills, negotiation skills, empathy, and others) to deal with the conflict on their own. When an arbitrator is introduced, they have no control over the process and the outcome.

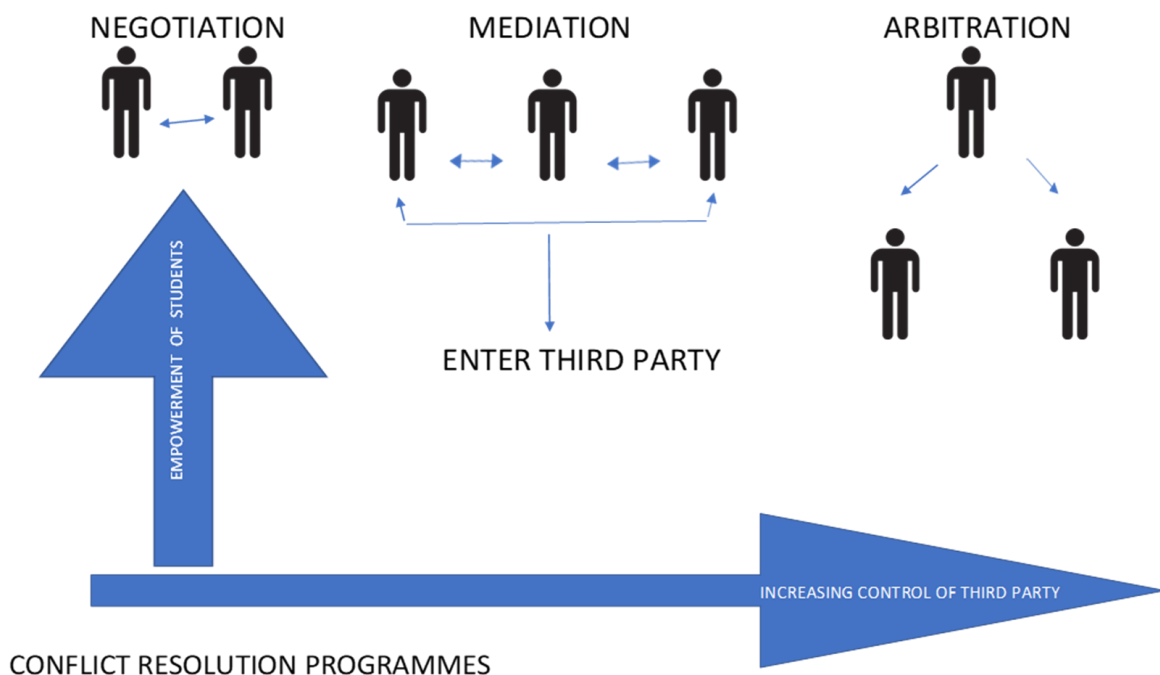


Figure 2:

Collaborative conflict resolution builds relationships since it gives students the opportunity to work together to resolve conflicts, they also learn to work together to find a solution that satisfies the different parties involved in the conflict.



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Maria Montessori and arguing at school

By Elena Passerini (CPP)

The Montessori method doesn't have specific rules about arguing at school. But her teaching is fundamental for education and inclusive society, aiming *"to create a sphere of action that will enable all mankind to work together."* It is impossible to work together as one mankind on a planet without the skills for quarrelling without violence.

It is important to study Montessori's works and go deeper in understanding her lessons¹ about cooperation, conflicts, and peace. All schools who would like to improve their methods for quarrels, non-montessorian schools included, may listen to her legacy. These points are key:

- the role of the adult in education and the importance of the relation between adult and child, child and other children, and children with the environment.
- The importance of mistakes for learning from experiences.
- The dignity of the child and the concept of "forgotten citizen"
- The concepts of education, conflict, and peace.
- The awareness about the question of the children in wars and the need for a work of regeneration and hygiene of the mind (*The White Cross*).

We cannot explain these concepts here but in the very long list of references for this project it is important to acknowledge the essential contribution of Maria Montessori. These quotations from *Education and Peace* are an attempt to show an overlooked aspect of the problem of conflict:

"The battle between adult and child"

"...We were deeply moved at the discovery of a real and awesome conflict, a ceaseless war, that confronts the child from the very day he is born and is part of his life all during his formative years.

¹ During a Dissemination Event for Arguing at school, Daniele Novara contributed to understanding the link between Montessori and the Litigare Bene method. [Here is the link to the Dissemination Event](#), in Italian addressed mainly to Italian teachers of FISM, a network of kindergartens.



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This conflict is between the adult and the child, between the blind and the clear-sighted.

The adult is truly blind to the child, and the child has a real vision, a bright little flame of enlightenment that he brings us as a gift. Both the adult and the child are unaware of their own characteristic natures. They fight one another in a secret struggle that has gone on for countless generations and is becoming even more violent today in our complicated and nerve-racking culture. The adult defeats the child; and once the child reaches adulthood the characteristic signs of the peace that is only an aftermath of war – destruction on one hand and painful adjustment on the other – remain with him for the rest of his life.” (Geneva 1932, p.15)

“It would take far too much time for me to paint the whole picture of our tragic lack of understanding of children. The world today, however, is beginning to realize that the life of the child is fraught with repression and injustice that must be remedied.

The principal message we have sought to preach is the need to construct an environment. This is not a materialistic notion: it has a solid foundation in man’s soul, for it takes into account something hidden deep within it. This social environment for the child must serve to protect him not in his weakness but in his inherent grandeur, for he possesses enormous potential energies that promise to benefit all mankind.

This task of protecting him, which is also a task of educating and reeducating adults, is an effort to guard the greatest treasure we possess, one that can guide us toward that light that we sum up in a single word: peace.

Discussion or meditation on the suffering of the child will not help us; what we need is a new approach involving a new way of thought. The path then becomes clear and easy to follow. And just as there is not a single man or woman anywhere who has not been a child and who will not readily admit that every capacity he or she possesses was acquired in childhood, so society must be led to see that this is true of its powers as well. The future action of humanity cannot be unilateral. Nothing can be achieved in the



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world of the adult that is not first achieved in the world of the child.”

(p. 87-88, Copenhagen 1937)

Relevance & transformative value of methods for managing quarrels at school

The Synopsis

In view of facilitating the reader in the identification of commonalities and differences between the methods that are proposed and studied by the project, a Comparison Synopsis is proposed in the following pages. The Synopsis called also “the Matrix”, is specifically conceived to highlight the peculiarities of the different conflict-transformation strategies fostered in their daily work by the project partners, with the objective of setting the stage for the following implementation steps of Litigare a Scuola. The idea of designing a Comparison Synopsis was the result of a preliminary in-depth discussion carried out during the first Transnational Project Meeting, held in Milan on 13-14 June 2022 and hosted by the project coordinator. During the meeting, it became clear that along with the organization of online Workshops focused on the methods in the early months of project implementation, the development of a reliable methodological framework would have necessarily needed a thorough comparative analysis of the practices. Despite having a strong focus on the methods and their application in the educational environment, the Matrix also examines the impact on the actors involved in the practices both from the individual and collective perspectives, as well as their theoretical and scientific backgrounds in the fields of education and educational psychology. Nonetheless, a key part of the comparative analysis developed by the tool aims at outlining the role of the main actors within the methods, not only stressing the ones of teachers and students but also school heads, non-teaching school staff, families, and collective bodies as teachers’ collegia and classrooms as a whole. Crucial in the Synopsis are the sections dedicated to the internal rules and concrete features of the methodologies, for instance the maximum number of students that can be involved, the possibility of working outside the school premises, and the actual space needed to be implemented. Such fields are indeed fundamental elements defining the transferability potential of the methods, which constitute one of the core elements of the Litigare a



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Scuola project. Evaluating the possibility of transferring the methods to other schools, educators, and, eventually, beyond the borders of their country of origin, is the beating heart of the Litigare a Scuola project. For this reason, while working on the matrix, great attention has been finally paid to the teachers' training dimension of the methods, studying the feasibility of integrating dedicated modules concerning the methods in wider capacity-building curricula. We hope that such a structuring tool might be useful to compare other methods that intervene in similar problems, thus offering teachers the possibility to choose a method with full awareness of the different features, as well as to researchers the possibility to identify gaps and alternative solutions for problems related to the positive transformation of conflicts at school.

Background and rationale of the Synopsis

Empty Synopsis: A Collection of Methods for Arguing at School

The aim of the Arguing at School Erasmus+ Project is to open a transnational discussion on the theme of quarrels and conflicts between peers, regarding children and teenagers from 2 to 18 years, in the context of their life experience at school. The form that we created is aimed at collecting various pedagogical methodologies of conflict management in formal, non-formal, and informal contexts.

[Here you can find the fill form](#) that we used to describe and compare the three methods. You can also use it to let us know if you have other methods that allow the educators/teachers to manage the quarrels among peers. Since February 2023 a [short form](#) has been published in order to let open the possibility of collecting new information about students quarrelling at school and methods to address it.



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Methods to manage children's quarrels

Methodological Essential points

Eight fundamental points seem to be common to all the methods considered, including the ones in Annex.

Fundamental points

- **Neutrality** of the adults.
- **Solution (if there is any) is discovered by students, not imposed by teachers.** They may find it with a “negotiation” (Litigare Bene), with the help of a neutral third party (Peer Mediation), or with the help of open questions asked by a trained teacher (Friendship Cards);
- Give time, space, tools, and rituals useful for quarrelling students in order **to let them live the experience of talking to each other**, and sharing emotions, perspectives, and proposals. Confidence is important;
- If students find an agreement, it is ok. If they find only a clarification, it is also ok. Teachers **do not judge** or evaluate students' agreement.

Why do methods work? Key points

- The **dignity** of students is central and teachers respect it always;
- Teachers with a method can **trust** students. They have reason to believe that students can do it by themselves. Student behaviour in the event of a quarrel becomes more foreseeable: they will use the method, without harming;
- Children's natural social instincts can guide them to find a way for clarification or an agreement. Teachers help using **methods**;
- Methods give space to students' creativity. They can find win-win strategies and **take care of their relationships**.



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Litigare Bene Method by Daniele Novara

Overview from CPP's perspective

CPP views children's quarrels as an opportunity for growth. A basic assumption is not to blame quarrelsome children: conflict between them is a form of interaction.

Adult interventionism is not only unnecessary, but it also inhibits children's instinctive self-regulatory ability to find agreement independently, especially for younger children. It also prevents the developmental frustration that arguing naturally provides. The experience of quarrels teaches children to know themselves and learn to be with others, gradually discovering resources and limits. Quarrels, even physical ones, are comparable to puppies using the game of fighting to figure out how to live together. It is therefore wrong to meddle in these dynamics and especially to want to look for the culprit, which is the usual thing handed down by traditional upbringing.

The Litigare Bene method, devised by Daniele Novara, can be used in school and at home and is effective in:

- Enable children to independently manage their quarrels without adult intervention
- Manage "difficult cases" in the classroom
- Prevent bullying
- Promote school inclusion
- Reduce the stress on teachers, educators, and parents.

From an educational perspective, arguing is an area of research and pedagogical work.

Listening to and collecting numerous stories that boys and girls give of their experiences of quarrels, one thing immediately stands out: adult perceptions of child quarrels and children's perceptions do not coincide.

For boys and girls, arguing is a natural experience: normal, physiological. It has no meaning other than what they experienced at the time.

The adult reaction to children's quarrels may disorient children. Adults end up giving often erroneous content to episodes that are in themselves marginal. Developmental psychology research on the subject has helped confirm certain characteristics of child quarrelsomeness, which can only be explained by interpreting quarrelsomeness as a physiological event, a



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modus vivendi, an almost inevitable part of playing together. The method aimed at parents and teachers, which Daniele Novara called "Litigare Bene," is the result of a long exploration of the possibility of teaching how to quarrel.

The starting hypothesis, confirmed by research, is that children throughout childhood have great abilities to self-regulate their quarrels.

The Litigare Bene method consists of two steps back and two steps forward:

- The first step back: *do not look for the culprit, because there is no culprit*
- The second step back: *do not impose the solution.*
- The first step forward: get them to talk to each other about the quarrel (*communication of each other's version*).
- The second step forward: *encourage agreement* between the parties.

Childhood quarrel is a form of interaction that if handled correctly helps personal and social development.

The Litigare Bene method was tested in schools in Turin in 2011. Many Italian schools have applied it since 2010 and it uses older experiences.

Some data (from Daniele Novara, Caterina Di Chio, 2013):

1. When the teacher applies the Litigare Bene method, children spontaneously agree three times more than when the adult intervenes to correct their behaviour. The data coincide for both Kindergarten and Primary.
2. Both before the experiment and after, when the adult does not intervene, children often resolve the quarrel on their own. Before the experimentation, Kindergarten children adopted "active renunciation" in 60% of cases and found spontaneous agreement in 33%. After methodological experimentation, children resolve the quarrel in 32% of cases through spontaneous agreement and 57% of cases through "active renunciation". If the adult intervenes in a corrective way, everything freezes and the quarrel remains frozen without any evolution (suspension of the quarrel and imposed agreement) in 92% of cases. A learning opportunity is lost in 92% of cases!



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3. When teachers use the method, the number of quarrels decreases more in Primary School (6-10 years) than in Kindergarten. This proves the naturalness with which children quarrel in the 3-6 years period, without any complications. The number of observed quarrels decreased by 47.7% in Primary school when the method was adopted.

Overview from the school's perspective

The Litigare Bene method is suitable for non-violent conflict resolution in children aged 2 to 10. OŠ Ivana Gorana Kovačića has positive experiences with Peer Mediation for students aged 11 to 14 but was missing a method for smaller children. Three teachers have been invited by CPO to join the Learning and Teachers Training Activity by Erasmus + Project EduCATE in 2017. There they met CPP and discovered the Litigare Bene method and tried to use it at school. Then the teachers, pedagogue, and director decided to introduce this method in all classes (1st-3rd) of our school. Erasmus+ KA1 project, implemented from August 2021 to August 2022, made this aim possible. [Our 12-minute video](#) gives an overview of the Litigare Bene method and has messages addressed to the aims of *Litigare a Scuola* Erasmus+ Project, from many voices of our school, children included. We presented the method in several schools and kindergartens and through the network of peaceful schools. We received information that 8 conflict corners were formed in 4 schools and kindergartens.

Key points:

- Prevention of violence through the acquisition of important life skills.
- Dealing with conflict in a positive way
- Learning how to live with others
- Emotional literacy and well-being in class

Brief description

The Litigare Bene method is suitable for non-violent conflict resolution in children aged 2 to 10. It consists of 2 steps back and 2 steps forward. Adults must not look for a culprit in a conflict because there isn't one. Blaming is very harmful to the child's personal development and does not contribute to conflict resolution. Adults must not impose their solution to the conflict. Instead, each child should tell his or her version of the conflict, and how they feel about it. It is important to encourage children to agree on their own.



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The Montessori and the Majeutic approach by Daniele Novara influenced the development of the Litigare Bene method because they encourage children's independence as they grow up. The Litigare Bene method is also based on the scientific research of Daniele Novara, who found that children from 2 to 10 years old are capable of managing conflicts completely independently without the interference of adults.

OŠ Ivana Gorana Kovačića Vrbovsko introduces the method in the first grade.

Preparation activities are important. Through 9 workshops, students learn about 4 basic emotions, about the difference between conflict and violence. Then they become familiar with the LB method by making posters, dramatizing class conflicts, and arranging the conflict corner in the class. They start to use conflict corners to resolve their conflicts. The workshops are interactive and experiential. They include storytelling,

conversation, dramatization, drawing, and listening to sounds. In the second grade, students acquire non-violent communication skills (active listening, good and bad messages, snake and giraffe language, and verbal and non-verbal communication).

Conflict corners could also be arranged in the class. It has 2 chairs, a table and a poster as a reminder. Conflict corners could also be arranged in the school garden or corridor.

Here are two examples of conflict corners in OŠ Ivana Gorana Kovačića Vrbovsko.



1. conflict corner in the class



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2. The conflict corner in the school garden

Children became independent in resolving conflicts. Conflicts were resolved more easily. Some situations no longer exist (e.g. taking things, making fun of drawings).

The conflict has been returned to the children. The teachers just support children in solving the conflict independently. Less stress for adults.

The method affects the students involved in a quarrel because it allows them to express their emotions, explain their point of view, listen, and try to understand that the other person has a different point of view. They negotiate and propose a solution.

Methodology

The teachers' role

The teacher does not declare the guilty party in a conflict. The teacher does not impose solutions to conflicts. The teacher encourages children to tell their side of the story. It allows every child to express his emotions. The teacher observes, encourages students to tell their side of the story, and if necessary helps students with questions (what happened, how do you feel, what can you do), ensures conditions (arranges the conflict corner), and encourages students to agree.



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Teachers leave the role of judge. In traditional pedagogy, teachers play an active role in children's conflicts. They determined who was to blame and how to resolve the conflict. Now the responsibility for the conflict is given to the children, which contributes to their independence.

Rules given to students

To calm down by letting out emotions verbally or in some other way that does not endanger the safety of the children. Active listening. While one speaks, the other listens and does not interrupt.

The role of the students directly involved in the quarrel is to take responsibility for the situation and try to find solutions that work for both parties. It is not necessary to reach an agreement. The emphasis is on talking, expressing emotions, active listening, compassion for each other, trying to understand the other's position, and changing attitudes about conflicts. Usually, the number of students involved is two. Sometimes the situation involves three students.

It is a **whole school approach**. Teachers' collegium was informed about the Litigare Bene method. All teachers who work with younger children (age 6-10) are educated (job shadowing in Italy in Casa dei Bambini Il Sassolino) and invited experts activities by CPP Elena Passerini and Tullia Masinari) and apply the method. They encourage students to use the method and provide support to colleagues. We systematically introduced the method in our school with the great professional support of the pedagogue.

Parents were informed about the method through four parent meetings. They support teachers and apply the method in their families. They encourage children's independence in expressing emotions, showing emotions, and non-violent conflict resolution. The method can be used in the family when there is a quarrel between siblings. Parents must show their feelings and encourage children to express theirs. Parents could involve children in making family decisions according to the age of the child. During free time or sports activities, children often get into conflicts with their peers. The skills they have acquired by applying the method can help them resolve conflict non-violently.

The principal of the school gets to know the method and encourages the application. He ensures working conditions and education and is supportive.



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In Croatia, schools have a pedagogue office. She promotes the method and educates teachers and all school employees. Cooperation with parents and the creation of [workshops](#) in cooperation with teachers is her job.

It was important for us to systematically introduce the method to the school. We decided to inform non-teaching staff about the method through lectures and workshops.

Examples of deployment

Example 1

Taking other's belongings without permission (A student took another student's pencil without asking). You can see in the [short video](#) taken by the teacher how children can sit in the conflict corner and talk to each other, listening to the other, and taking turns speaking with the ritual object. Adults do not need to listen to the conversation. It is children's business. They listen to each other.

Example 2

An older student was playing with two younger boys teaching them how to fight. The younger ones tried it and didn't like it because he was hurt. They decided not to do it anymore. You can [look at non-verbal language](#): emotions change during the process. The bigger child listens to the other, gives him back the ball, and shares his time with him.



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Friendships Cards Method

Overview from RAFF's perspective

The creation of the cards was influenced by three frameworks from the field of education and psychology. Vygotsky's social development theory (1978), Alexander's dialogic model of teaching (2008), and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). Vygotsky's theory (1978) claimed that crucial learning happens when a learner interacts with a skilled facilitator in a particular social setting. The model illustrates the zone of proximal development, where the facilitator helps the learner internalize and master knowledge. This guided participation empowers students to take responsibility for their learning, and thus the teacher becomes a facilitator of learning, guiding the student to engage in different activities so that they develop new skills and problem-solving techniques. Alexander's theory emphasizes the need for ongoing dialogue between the facilitator and the students. Through dialogue, facilitators help students to engage with their developing ideas, help them overcome misunderstandings, expand their ideas, and build and evaluate arguments. Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979) on the other hand, assumes that learners' development is affected by everything that happens in their surrounding environment (e.g. the home or the school). In other words, these various settings that individuals experience in life have an impact on them and change or modify their behaviour. The use of this tool is therefore context-based and promotes student agency, helping students to develop effective communication skills, critical thinking skills, and problem solving skills (Camilleri & Bezzina, 2021).

Brief description

The tool is made up of a set of cards divided into 5 sections – Feelings, Bad Move, Good Move, Making Up and the Feeling Section once again. The tool can be used by educators, parents and other professionals. The cards can be used with case studies, stories or short clips according to the age and needs of the children and adolescents. Once the story or experience is shared, the educators, parents or/and professionals use the 'Feeling' cards to process the associated feelings of the characters in the story. The 'Bad Moves' and the 'Good Moves' cards, then help children and adolescents understand how different characters behave or react to a conflict.

Through exploration, discussion, reflection and analysis the children and adolescents begin to understand why certain moves (behaviours) are



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negative and why others are positive. They begin to understand that when you make the wrong choices (bad moves) the conflict will get bigger while when you make the right choice (good moves) the conflict is settled amicably.

The 'Making up' cards give different options on how the children and adolescents could settle conflicts in an amicable resolution. The last phase is the understanding of how the feelings of the characters in the story might change when there is an amicable resolution to the conflict but remain the same or become more inappropriate when the conflict escalates or is not tackled appropriately. The cards can be used as a preventive or educational tool or as an intervention tool eg. when two children are fighting between themselves and they do not have the ability and the competencies to solve the conflict amicably.

Prevention purpose: When the cards are used in a classroom setting, the teacher can use the cards during her or his lessons but has to prepare the lesson and the resources beforehand.

Intervention purposes: The counselor, guidance teacher or class teacher needs a quiet room where the students in question can talk about their conflicts and their feelings with the help of the cards.

Building cooperation: Using Friendship Cards there is more cooperation between students, they learn to understand each other better and are aware that when a conflict arises there are cards which they can use to manage the conflict amicably. The tool creates a safe space for students to discuss and share what they are experiencing in their lives inside and outside school. Students who are exposed to different feelings and emotions, are able to integrate this into their everyday behaviour and attitudes, becoming more emotional literate and thus are able to deal with conflicts in a mature way. Understanding, empathy and concern for others can also instill in students a sense of forgiveness.

Teachers role: The teacher takes on a more facilitative role and uses the cards to empower students and help them develop the necessary skills to deal with the conflict. This not only instills in them a sense of responsibility but also helps them develop conflict-resolution skills that they can use in different social contexts. When students learn how to handle conflict responsibly, they own the problem and the solutions they find. The children now have a sense of ownership of the problem and the solution, thereby enabling the teacher to facilitate the process and focus on the learning outcomes and design strategies that with facilitate learning new life skills.



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The teacher becomes a facilitator of learning, s/he does not seek to solve the conflict herself/himself but empowers the student to use the cards to find an amicable and peaceful way of dealing with the conflict. The teacher uses the group's skills and participation to motivate the students to reflect and analyze the feelings and behaviour that occur during a conflict. She uses various techniques to elicit responses from students themselves eg . including questioning techniques, probing, paraphrasing and empathy to promote dialogue and discussion.

Rules for teachers

The process is flexible and may be adapted to the situation that is being presented. The teacher may utilize the phases in the process of the cards and use different methodologies to introduce the Friendship cards and conflicts (e.g. Storytelling, drama). The emphasis is for the teacher to create a context where the children feel safe to share, play and learn. The teacher may focus on the three domains that help students learn how to solve conflicts amicably. The three domains are:

1. Emotional domain
2. Cognitive domain
3. Behavioural domain.

Guidelines for teachers a) Use the feeling cards to help students identify their own emotions and those of others when there is a conflict (emotional domain). b) Introduce the bad and good moves cards so that students understand the consequences of their behaviour and develop an understanding of other's perspectives (cognitive domain) c) Use the making-up cards so that students learn how to cooperate, mediate, and find solutions together (behavioural domain). d) The final feelings cards are used to show students that when conflicts are solved in a peaceful and amicable way everyone will feel better and listened to (emotional domain).

Students role

The students collaborate, dialogue and discuss with each other; they share their feelings and try to find a solution that is suitable for all parties concerned. Conflict, therefore, becomes an opportunity for growth and learning, it helps them develop negotiation and problem-solving skills, helps them understand that conflicts affect different persons differently, that conflicts are part of life, and that there are a lot of emotions involved in conflicts that need to be shared and understood. The dynamic and positioning of the children involved in the quarrel change as they navigate their way through the process of the game. Initially, they are individuals; as



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they play, they are transformed into a group working together and once a solution is found, they become a team.

The students become active participants throughout the whole process. The intervention with the help of the cards allows everyone to share his or her feelings, thoughts, and ideas. When the cards are used as a preventive tool, the students in the conflict work with all the other students to reflect, dialogue and come up with a solution that is acceptable for all. When the cards are used as an intervention tool, the students involved in the quarrel take an active role in trying to find a solution that is acceptable to them. The counselor/guidance teacher/class teacher does not impose his ideas but facilitates the session, allows the student to share their feelings, their frustrations and helps the students to reflect and identify ways to deal with the conflict so things would not escalate and eventually find a solution where everybody wins.

Rules given to students

The process is flexible and may be adapted to the situation. We recommend that the children are given the freedom to play with the game and decide which cards to choose and discuss. This openness and freedom could unlock emotions and children feel safe sharing past experiences. Some guidelines to follow:

1. Allow everyone to share his/her feelings
2. Value all contributions and no put-downs
3. Follow the process of the cards eg. Concept of good and bad moves
4. Listen and look at the person speaking
5. Enjoy playing the game.

Key points:

- Social and Emotional Development skills: different situations can cause different emotional reactions in different people. Students learn that when a conflict occurs, they may express their emotions without demeaning or blaming others;
- Dialogue, working together, and listening to the other persons' side. (Empathy);
- Teachers create a safe place for learning;
- Teachers learn to use open-ended questions, encourage discussion, exploration, reflection and feedback;
- Teachers facilitate the process and let the children experience the process, thereby becoming owners of the problem and encourage them to come up with their solution.



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Overview from the school's perspective

The Friendship cards are a very important tool for Maria Regina Naxxar Induction Hub. These cards have opened a gateway to success in communication and stability regarding emotions and feelings towards each other and among the students themselves. The school has been processing such cards for more than three years and no words of regret were ever heard. Once we decided that these cards would be used we made it a must that all educators would get the necessary training but not all educators were obliged to use them. Thus, the use of these cards was left to the educators' choice. In general, we have a mixture of educators who use these cards in primary and secondary school. At times we also had sessions where the educators themselves had the chance to demonstrate what they have been doing in class by inviting their colleagues over or even by doing a short presentation during the curriculum time.

From our experience as educators, these cards give them a better idea of how they can share their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. For the Induction Hub these Cards are very helpful and useful since for the first couple of months we have learners coming to our school without any means of communication since they come from different countries all over the world. These learners arrive at our school without any knowledge of the English Language and thus do not have the ability to speak, share their experiences, and process their feelings and emotions. From experience, one could be able to see that the students after only some sessions would be able to share and experience a positive change in attitude, they would be able to use the Cards and express themselves alone and maybe even share their experiences with others. While some learners would start attending school with hesitation, others would find these cards helpful and would give them that chance to grow and become more comfortable in respecting each other and in expressing their feelings. The cards have colourful pictures so that the learners can understand perfectly what is going on. There are bilingual Cards, in English and also in students' native language.



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Some benefits that can be seen in students using friendship cards are as follows:

- *they take responsibility for their own behaviour and are able to develop their own strategies*
- *they are capable of finding new creative solutions to problems*
- *respect and accept each other as individuals*
- *learn how to express their emotions and feelings*
- *cultivate empathy for others and other situations.*

Hence as a conclusion, one can say that the Friendship cards are giving and encouraging students to develop their social and emotional learning in a safe caring environment through a child-centered approach. This helps the students understand the life around them as at first, they come to school with a sense of guilt. For such emotion, we feel that these cards have and are helping our learners by giving them stability, consistency in routine, and a sense of belonging and acceptance. This together with the experience of the educators will give the learners an experience where they can and will be able to communicate together and understand each other.

On 16th November 2022 a group of *Arguing at school* partners and invited guests visited two schools in Malta, sitting in the classes during the lessons with the Friendship cards, in Pre-primary, Primary, and Secondary school. They wrote positive messages of feedback. Here is one of them, Loredana Manasia and Gratiela Ianos, pedagogues at the University Politehnica of Bucharest:

The pupils had worked to organize a parents' evening. Some conflicts emerged and the two teachers were guiding the pupils to analyse what they experienced.

The goal of using the cards was to promote a constructive, non-adversarial approach to conflict resolution, which can be especially beneficial in an educational setting where it is important to maintain a positive and supportive learning environment. By using this approach, schools can encourage communication and collaboration to find solutions that benefit everyone involved, rather than relying on punishment or discipline to address conflicts. The method was applied in an interactive way. Thus, it boosted the participation of all parties involved in the



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resolution process. The approach focused on open and honest communication, active listening, and negotiation to find a mutually acceptable solution. All parties were encouraged to express their perspective and work together towards a resolution that addresses their concerns and interests. The method was designed to ignite a collaborative process, with the goal of promoting understanding and resolving conflicts in a constructive and non-adversarial manner.

The method seemed to be effective in helping students understand how to express feelings and deal with conflicts amicably. This approach has been shown to be an effective alternative to traditional methods of conflict resolution, such as litigation or arbitration. By promoting open communication and collaboration, the method can lead to more satisfactory and lasting solutions, as well as improved relationships between the parties involved. Additionally, the method can be less costly, less time-consuming, and less stressful for all parties involved than more adversarial approaches to conflict resolution. However, like any conflict resolution approach, its effectiveness will depend on factors such as the willingness of all parties to participate in the process and their willingness to compromise.

Examples of deployment

Example 1

Disagreement in class, for example, there could be differences between students or even groups of students potentially coming from different backgrounds or cultures. Isolation/exclusions of students from groups or playground activities. This exclusion could lead to loneliness, anger and sadness amongst other emotions.

Awareness of emotions. The cards focus on the quarrel situation, however, they create a foundation for discussion and dialogue. Before tackling the conflict or quarrel itself the students are made aware of the different emotions they and others experience during the conflict or quarrel (emotional literacy). They learn that people experience different emotions during a conflict or/and quarrel and that it is important to talk about these emotions before one starts to find means and ways to find an amicable solution to the conflict or/and quarrel.

[Look at the video](#)



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Example 2

The cards are flexible and can be used individually or as a set to manage a process.

- Training of teachers, so they are knowledgeable about the methodology and pedagogy of this educational tool, a non-formal accredited course is available;
- Teacher prepares a lesson about conflict resolution;
- Teacher has to prepare cards, and any other resources s/he intends to use during the lesson;
- Teacher introduces the lesson by using a story or a short clip about conflict;
- Teacher introduces feeling cards and helps students go through the process of the cards, so they learn that conflicts arouse a lot of feelings and that there are different positive ways of how to solve such conflicts;
- Teacher uses different resources and drama to allow students to cooperate and work with each other.

Peer Mediation Method

Overview from CPO's perspective

CPO offers a Program in Peer Mediation, developed by CPO (2008). It consists of 5 full days of training, setting up of a mediation club within a school, promotion of peer mediation in the school and local community, supervision of work of the mediation club, and two years of support for teachers and children mediators. CPO's education philosophy and methodology were influenced by Adam Curle (Quaker Community Mediation) and Nonviolent Communication by M. Rosenberg.

Programme can be started as early as 4th or 5th grade in primary schools. Later is not recommended, but the programme can be easily adapted for the first grade of secondary school. All children from all classes of one generation (age 9/10), their head teachers, principal, school pedagogue are involved.

Representatives of parents, Representatives of students, local community policemen are involved, too.

The Programme consists of 5 full days of training, setting up of a mediation club within a school, promotion of peer mediation in the school and local



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community, supervision of work of the mediation club and two years of support for teachers and children mediators.

It needs preparation activities (planning together with school staff and choosing classes and teachers who will be involved; presentations of the programme for a **whole school** - teachers' meetings, parents' meetings, meeting with representatives of students).

This method, which includes opening a peer mediation club in school, depends upon the motivation and willingness of the whole school, without which support it is difficult to motivate students to start using peer mediation club and/or to continue using and developing peer mediation (to educate new generations of mediators without outside support).

Classes (children and their headteacher together) that were included choose (anonymous questionnaire) several of their classmates whom they would trust to talk to in a situation of conflict and they get the opportunity to become mediators. During the second half of the school year, one group of children (selected future mediators) and at least two adults (who will be in charge of the mediation club and future education of mediators) meet once a week and learn mediation skills, set up a mediation club and prepare promotion activities for the beginning of the next year (total of min. 3 full days).

Beginning of the next school year, mediators officially open the mediation club and start with promotion activities in their school (that they have designed, which most of the time include posters, brochures, presentations in all classes of the school, and sometimes a theatre play) and also start doing mediation cases and continue to meet once a week in a mediation club where they can practice, get support, supervision and plan fun activities for their school). CPO's team supports the school for two school years. During the second year, we support them in organising the work of the mediation club, organising short extra education blocks if needed, and connecting them with other schools that have peer mediation clubs and individuals mediators (e.g. judges mediators who can visit mediators in school), trainers or teachers who use mediation in their classes only, we connect the school with community policemen in charge of the area where the school is situated, etc.

In this model, students are informed where and when they can ask for a mediator.

This can be different in different schools, depending on the organisational and logistical situation and preferences of all involved. Mostly the



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mediation session is organised on the same day in a room reserved only for the mediation club, decorated and furnished by mediators during the preparation period. The room has posters with communication guidelines and mediation steps, papers, a code of ethics for mediators, and different forms (depending on the age of students). Mediation is done by two peer mediators and one adult person is waiting in the next room for the case mediators should ask for help or support.

Entire classes of students learn about conflict, feelings, and needs and have an introduction to mediation and practice some of conflict resolution skills so that they understand the basic (different) nonviolent approach of solving conflicts, get some of the skills they can use in solving conflicts without a third party and understand what mediation is, so that, when they cannot solve their conflict alone, they are motivated to seek help from mediators.

Students get helped by peers to solve the situation with win/win results. On top of that, they gain experience that solving problems in such a way (win/win) is possible and are motivated to try themselves in future conflicts to listen to other parties and try to find creative solutions.

In this model, students are informed where and when they can ask for a mediator. This can be different in different schools, depending on the organisational and logistical situation and preferences of all involved. Mostly the mediation session is organised on the same day in a room reserved only for the mediation club, decorated and furnished by mediators during the preparation period. The room has posters with communication guidelines and mediation steps, papers, a code of ethics for mediators, and different forms (depending on the age of students). Mediation is done by two peer mediators and one adult person is waiting in the next room for the case mediators should ask for help or support. Two students are peer mediators in one quarrel, and parties in conflict are two or more children as parties in conflict.

Teachers learn about conflict, feelings, and needs, have an introduction to mediation, and practice some conflict resolution skills so that they understand the basic (different) nonviolent approach to solving conflicts, get some of the skills they can use in solving conflicts without a third party and understand what mediation is, so that, when their students need help, they refer them to mediators instead being a "judge" in the conflict and have trust that children can solve it in a good way themselves. The two or more teachers who are in charge of the mediation club, get also mediation skills and trainer skills to be able to educate new generations of mediators and support them (supervision skills).



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Teachers' role is to recognise that there is a conflict and that the children cannot solve it themselves. Then the teacher should ask what the conflict is about and refer students to the mediation club if the conflict is suitable. Teachers in charge of MC are responsible for supporting mediators and should be close to being able to help or advise peer mediators if needed. They also talk to mediators after the mediation session about the process, feelings, and needs of mediators and celebrate successes together.

The School pedagogue has an important role in Croatia. It is highly recommended that the psychologist and the school pedagogue participate in the education and the whole process. They can use acquired skills to use mediation formally or informally in conflicts between adults in school, between parents and teachers, and so on. If they do, in most cases they report to us that these skills have become very important for them and are very useful, if not essential, in their everyday work in school.

Methodology

Rules for teachers

Don't try to impose solutions on students - have trust that they know what they need and what is best for them and if they need help refer them to the mediation club.

Rules given to students

If you have a conflict that you cannot solve yourself or would like help, seek mediators in your mediation club. Mediation is voluntary and confidential and you will be in charge of a solution together with the other participant in conflict. Mediators will not suggest what to do or say, they will just help you talk in a safe space, without insults and other violent words, and choose a solution that you both will like.

Key points

- Nonviolent communication
- Mediation
- Training methodology, supervision skills, organizing Peer Mediation Club



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Overview from the school's perspective

School Ivana Goran Kovačić has been implementing Peer Mediation at school for more than ten years. The Forum (FSO) developed the method for Freedom of Education Zagreb. School teachers were trained to implement it in 2009, and since then they have been regularly implementing it. www.fso.hr

The school cooperates with the Forum for Freedom of Education, the Croatian Mediation Association, and SOS Rijeka.

School Ivan Goran Kovacic promoted the method for the education of primary and secondary school teachers in Zagreb, organised by the FSO, on education: "Conflict as an opportunity" organised by the Center for Peace and Nonviolence from Osijek, in Podgorica, Montenegro, for principals organised by the Association for Peace Mediation, Montenegro, organised by the Association of SOS Rijeka and HUM. There students-members of Little Mediators presented the method and numerous professional meetings in our surroundings.

Brief description

Peer Mediation benefits us in changing the attitudes and beliefs of both students and adults. We still face traditional beliefs that conflicts should be resolved with penalties. Teachers must learn that conflicts are part of everyday life and can be solved without punishing students. Teachers must be ready to change their attitudes and beliefs to learn not to judge but to encourage the students to communicate.

Thanks to the introduction of this method, we are noticing changes in attitudes and beliefs and resolving conflicts with our teachers, too.

Students learn active listening, the reflection of feelings, toleration of the views and behaviours of others, cooperation, interest and respect for others, empathy and compassion, critical thinking and problem-solving, negotiation, coping with frustration and controlling aggression, and reaching a compromise with the transformation of conflicts. The method is based on the mediator's neutrality, meaning it does not condemn nor support either side. This contributes to the feeling of appreciation and active listening for both sides. They learn to strengthen self-awareness and



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their identity, empathizing with each other, and developing awareness of individual and collective responsibility.

Peer Mediation works with students from grades 4 to 8. Students' parents are familiar with nonviolent conflict resolution techniques and are also considered a target group. Students from the first to the third grade cannot implement the method according to the rules.

At the beginning of the fourth grade, students are introduced to nonviolent communication and the method of mediation (5 steps). Five school hours are required to apply for them. After getting acquainted with the method, the teacher continued to use the method during the fourth grade in her practice. With the students of the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades, we do workshops as preparation for peer workshops.

Peer mediation occurs in class, the hallway, or in the educator's office. This has proven less effective, and we are striving for a space where peer mediation will occur.

There are five steps in the method which the students are familiar with:

- defining the rules (what is mediation, the role of the mediator: do not interrupt, confidentiality, the neutrality of the mediator),
- the description of the situation (Each participant in the mediation process tells their side of the story. The mediator uses paraphrasing so that, within the very process, the students can hear the other side.)
- the ability to ask each other questions and define positions,
- offering a possible solution (solutions can be varied, and the mediator repeats them all in the end),
- An agreement on the solution that is acceptable for both sides. If mediation doesn't lead to a solution, it is repeated twice, and the adult decides on the conflict.

Peer Mediation involves 2 students and 1 mediator.

Rules for teachers

Compliance with methods and mediation rules and steps, primary observance of neutrality **without accusation and judgement**. Appreciation of the dignity of students and tolerance for diversity. The teacher observes without interfering, and respects the dignity of the students.

Rules for students

Compliance with active listening and interrupting the other person, respect confidentiality.



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Key points

- Changing attitudes about how to resolve conflicts
- Teachers learn to encourage students to communicate instead of punishing
- Collective responsibility (culture of mediation, neutrality, awareness)

Examples of deployment

Example 1

Resolving the conflict over the accusation of rewriting on the test: one student accused another student of copying her test for which she got a negative mark. [Look at it here](#).

Example 2

The mediation method does not always come to a solution to the conflict situation, and we ask for further assistance in resolving the conflict. An example is a conflict over the accusation of illegal smoking: a student accuses another of having problems with her parents who found a pack of cigarettes among her belongings. [No solution in this case](#).

Example 3

One student from CPO doesn't do his/her part of the homework, so the other student gets a lower grade as well. [School Mediation Video](#)

Differences and similarities between methods

For most people, the word quarrel is connected with something negative to avoid. In the family, among friends, at work, and school, we're afraid that quarrels lead to a break of relations. It almost seems that if there's a conflict between children this is our failure – as teachers, educators, and parents.

But avoiding conflict between peers doesn't permit children to develop social skills, useful for their relationship with others.

By studying three methods used to manage quarrels between peers, this Erasmus+ project aims to promote a different vision of the role of adults in this evolution path toward fundamental social skills.

Recapping the work done, what are the main similarities and differences between the 3 methods?



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Similarities

- Emotional literacy and dealing with conflict positively are **the main aims**.
- All methods **promote** self-awareness and decentralization, coping with stress, toleration, active listening, empathy, and cooperation.
- Enough time in a safe space
- All the methods take care to create **a safe situation**, in which children can share points of view and emotions positively.
- All the methods take care of promoting **a neutral description of the situation**, to permit each point of view to emerge.
- What is asked of participants
- Every method **asks children** involved in active listening, respect, coping with anger, and safely expressing emotion (without endangering others, using only words, or drawings, or with the support of other techniques).

The role of adults

All the methods ask adults to assume **a neutral position** and to transmit appreciation to students. Everyone's equal dignity is always recognised. The adult is first of all **a good observer**.

In all the methods the adult is a **facilitator**, who elicits answers from the students, building **a safe space** for meeting.

What do you need to start?

- Before being introduced in class every method first starts with a phase of **training** for children about communication and emotion.
- A few tools are needed: the Friendship cards set, two seats, and an object word (e.g. a little stick) for Litigare Bene. Peer Mediation needs a manual and register.

When and where does the method work?

- Giving **space** for quarrels is important: the methods can be used in classrooms, corridors, school gardens, and everywhere. Peer Mediation needs a confidential space.
- Every method usually involves **two children** arguing, or three.
- The methods are used at **school** but can be used also in the family or other situations, *formal* (scouts, youth clubs, summer schools) and *informal* (free time and sports activities).



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- The methods can be used with children with **special needs**, but you need to take care of their involvement and regulate the intervention on their skills.
- All the team of **teachers** need to be involved in promoting the daily use of methods.
- Usually, the **training** on methods is non-mandatory training, it is extracurricular.

What are the best conditions to permit the methods to work well? Which is the main obstacle?

- **Teachers' and parents' beliefs** based on traditional schooling (e.g: the teacher should play an active role in children's conflict; teachers that don't think that conflicts are a part of everyday life, and that arguments lead *always* to violence; adults without a clear willing to change their attitudes and beliefs, if it's necessary) these can be strong obstacles to introducing the methods into the classroom.
- Where present the school's **pedagogue** promotes the use of the method with teachers, non-teaching staff, and parents. Involves all the staff in training and updates, carrying out checks and reflections on the application of the method.
- All the **non-teaching staff** has to be at least informed of the methods used in the classroom, to collaborate with it.
- **Directors or heads of schools** can support the dissemination of these methods in classrooms taking care of the work climate, well-being of teachers and promoting a concrete culture of continuous training. Furthermore, informs the local community and the media about the development of the method in school as a general strategy for non-violent conflict resolution.
- **Parents** are fundamental to aligning domestic education with the approach of the method. By listening to the experiences of quarrels at schools of their sons and daughters, parents can revise their traditional approach to quarrelling. In the end, parents are the basics to strengthen the ability of children to approach conflicts in a positive way.



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Nothing is improvised: the theoretical bases are strong and clear for each method.

- All the methods have a **strong theoretical background**: mediation and Rosemberg's nonviolent communication (for Peer Mediation); Vygotsky's theory and the zone of proximal development, Alexander's dialogic model of teaching and Bronfenbrenner's theory about the surrounding environment of learning (for Friendship Cards); the maieutic approach and Montessori (for Litigare Bene).
- The **rules** to use all these methods are clearly defined (for example: do not interrupt the person who's speaking, do not devalue the opinion of others, etc.).

What are the results of the application of the methods?

- The methods **permit children to** change attitudes and beliefs about quarrels, develop the skills of collaboration and dialogue, increase their ability to share feelings, improve problem-solving, understand that conflicts affect a different person differently and involve a lot of emotions, explain better personal points of view and accept easily the others, to improve skills of negotiation.
- Raising the direct responsibility of children the 3 methods permit teachers to **reduce the stress** connected with conflicts.
- All the methods aim to **prevent** violence. The space is made safe by the prohibition of hitting and insulting each other and the agreement of confidentiality that prevents gossip. Methods make students **work on** individual reflection, emotional literacy, active listening, empathy, communication skills, and dialogue.
- **The three methods work!** Using these methods students can argue better among themselves, and in the end, they find a solution, a **clarification** or, anyway, a feeling of relief (felt both by students and teachers).
- For **long-term results** we have evidence about Friendship cards, and there's a work-in-progress qualitative survey for Litigare Bene; for Peer Mediation a survey about the theme is missing (but it's possible to do it).



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Differences

Target

Litigare Bene is perfect for early years (2-6), and up to 10 (in Italy up to 13). Peer mediation works well from 10 to 18. Friendship cards can be used for all **targets** (3-18).

Time of use

The management of the conflict happens at the same **moment** as the clash for Litigare Bene and Friendship cards when emotions are still present.

Peer mediation intervenes after the conflict: the conflicting parties should cool down emotional participation and then approach clarification.

Specific aims

Cards and Litigare Bene stress the impact of **feelings** and **behaviour** on the management of arguing.

Underlines more that the adults have to leave the role of **judge**, to assume a more neutral role of observer, guarantor and facilitator.

One of the objectives of Friendship Cards is to **help children become friends**, i.e. developing life skills, trust, getting to know yourself, becoming assertive, empathy, and compassion: these are values required to become a good friend to yourself and others.

Cards and Litigare Bene seem to work also very well with other **techniques** like drawing, poster making, storytelling, drama, etc..

In the end, Mediation works more on **shared problem solving**, Cards on **emotional literacy**, and Litigare Bene on **independence**.

Solution

For Peer mediation and Friendship cards it is more important to arrive at a **solution shared** between the children involved. For Litigare Bene a solution is welcome, but the main aim is educational.

A guided process

Peer mediation and Friendship cards manage the conflict through a well-defined **guided process**: mediation through 5 clear steps (defining rules, paraphrasing, asking questions, solutions, and agreements) and cards through open questions. Instead, Litigare Bene is a much open form and a not-guided process: children are the full protagonists of the conflict.



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The role of the adults

The presence of **adults** seems more relevant with Friendship cards and, in part, also for Peer mediation. In both cases, teachers are a facilitator of learning, directly and indirectly.

In Litigare Bene the trained children can manage their conflict autonomously, but this doesn't mean that the adult can shirk his/her role of guidance and guarantor of the development of a pacific process. The Litigare Bene method has a basic point of focus on “il bambino montessoriano”, which means: the child can do it alone, but adults have to organise an auxiliary environment for them.

About transferability

To value the **transferability** of methods, it seems relevant that Peer mediation needs longer and more complex **training**, for teachers and students (the peer mediators): in the end a whole school approach is necessary. It looks like for Peer Mediation is very important to rely on a network of schools, teachers, and the accompaniment of trainers.

Also for Litigare Bene is basic that all the staff is involved, but the training seems easier (although is exigent, because it asks the adults to assume a neutral position, and in some cases, this is not natural).

Instead, Friendship Cards could also be used by a single teacher, by a personal decision, without asking colleagues to do a shared project.

Friendship cards underline concepts like **forgiveness** and refer to the "Golden rule" ("Do to others as you would have them do to you") as a key to the process among participants.

For Friendship cards forgiveness is a life value, not for religious or spiritual reasons.

Teachers don't force children to forgive each other, but during the training, it is important to talk about it and people understand that forgiveness can lead to feelings of understanding, empathy, and compassion.

During training, some participants found peace with themselves after a long period, because they forgave the person whom they quarreled with and still did not speak to him/her. Forgiveness does not mean that you forget or excuse the harm, or make up with someone who has harmed you, but understanding that when you forgive someone else you bury the grudge that you had, and thus you can move forward in your life.



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Maybe it is easier for a school or a group of teachers to accept a method like Friendship Cards which refers to **forgiveness**. It could be more difficult for a group of traditional teachers to accept the use of a method like Litigare Bene which asks them two strong steps back: not to blame, not to look for a culprit, and finally never say: "The rule is: do not quarrel".

In this sense, **job shadowing** in a school where the Litigare Bene method is well known will be crucial to promoting the change of teachers' traditional beliefs.

On the other hand, for those teachers who find it very difficult to revise their beliefs, it may be more sustainable to let them see the children playing quietly with the cards.

To promote the dissemination of methods it's basic to work on **visibility**, with a great limit: the necessity to guarantee the children's privacy. What kind of material (videos and images of children) can be used in teachers' training or *in situ* conferences, and what can be uploaded online? This is an open problem.

Other specific characteristics of each method

Peer Mediation

Mediation needs a separate quiet **space/room**, while Litigare Bene makes children build a ritual Conflict Corner. Friendship cards don't need a special place.

The aim of Peer mediation is more connected to reconciliation and finding a shared solution in a *win-win* perspective. With this method children or teenagers learn, first of all, to ask for help from peers to solve their conflicts peacefully.

Friendship Cards

Friendship cards work on a **concrete material** that helps the person look at the conflict from an external point of view. Are more focused on facilitating the comprehension of the impact of **emotion** and **behaviour** on conflict.

The method seems more useful **to prevent conflict**, empowering the social skills of the person involved. In the preventive use of the Cards, it is important that children can enjoy the dimension of **playing** the game.

Cards permit one to be involved in *prevention* **the whole classroom**.

They can be used often **in lessons**, with a connection with various school disciplines and themes. But if you want to use them in a preventive way,



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and to develop a whole approach to the theme, it needs more intensive work by the team of teachers.

Other advantages of Friendship Cards are:

- an electronic version, that can be used online, or on a whiteboard;
- availability of the Cards in 20 languages;
- a tool developed for children with special needs;
- Friendship cards, together with Journey cards and Therapy cards, are parts of a whole tool.

Litigare Bene by Daniele Novara

In the Litigare Bene method "**Do not blame**" is a rule concern first of all to adults: normally children don't blame children, it happens as a result of their "absorbent mind" (as Montessori explains) when they align to adult behaviour and imitate them.

Benefits of these methods

Benefits for children/students:

- Create a *safe environment* to manage or deal with the conflict, to express their points of view and emotions, and to listen to others, without the fear of being judged.
- Identify emotions.
- Have *guidelines* that lead to the negotiation or mediation and eventually to an agreement or clarification.
- Develop *transversal competencies*: communicative skills, emotional literacy, collaborative skills, reframing issues, conflict resolutions, active listening, reflective thinking, presentation skills, reasoned decision-making, initiative, sociability, collegiality, compassion, integrity, awareness, tolerance, openness, intercultural understanding, empathy, self-respect, stress management
- *Prevent the escalation* of a conflict. Prevent *violence/bullying*.
- *Provide inclusiveness*. Children with special needs can use the methods.



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- Provide availability outside the school environment (family, clubs, free time activities, field trips, etc.).
- Offer a *win-win perspective*, nobody is *the culprit*.
- Develop students' autonomy in dealing with conflicts (Litigare Bene).
- Methods help students express themselves when they cannot find the right word.
- Provide flexibility of usage.

Benefits for teachers

- No direct responsibility for children's quarrels
- No direct intervention, which means less stress. Teachers are facilitators.
- By using methods, teachers can become more open-minded and willing to change their attitudes and behaviours.
- Teachers' well-being: a feeling of relief.
- They acquire a tool to deal with/ approach conflicts.
- They can trust children and believe that children can handle their quarrels.

Benefits for the community

- The transversal competencies formed during the practices of the method can lead to *civic behaviour*.
- *In the short term*, a shared solution or clarification, a feeling of relief;
- *In the long run*, a change in attitudes and behaviours.
- *A change in belief*: children can handle their quarrels.

Long-term impact of methods

The following question is very important in our Matrix:

Is there any evidence of long-term learning outcomes, from students who have used the method years before?

Several research papers are being written on Friendship cards. One of the [research papers](#) may be found. After each session [children are asked](#) to draw what they learned, samples may be found on children are asked to complete a [feedback form](#), samples of the form may be found on videos on the impact, and [testimonials may be found](#).



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THE LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF TRAINING ON QUARRELS BETWEEN PEERS AT SCHOOL: THE EXPERIENCE OF “IL SASSOLINO”

By Massimo Lussignoli, Annalisa Schirato, Michele Vezzoli (INTRO)

Does the application of a method of quarrelling at school produce effects in the long term? Experimenting in school years with articulated methods to manage in an educational way the conflicts between peers, what kind of imprint does it leave on pupils?

In these teens, trained in quarrelling, can you see significant differences from the traditional management of conflicts, based on simple common sense, when there is no specific training?

To answer these questions, the Consortium entrusted Sassolino with the implementation of **a qualitative pilot research**, to produce an audiovisual testimony that could be immediately used in following educational events.

The Sassolino, a Montessori kindergarten, has applied the method Litigare Bene by Daniele Novara since 2012. **After 10 years of systematic application, it seemed interesting to try to bring together those children**, who at the time were attending kindergarten, to check with them how they live today the quarrels at school and among peers.

At Sassolino the conflict corner - the safe place where children try to manage the conflict, with the help of teachers - is red, like the anger that must be controlled, to be lucid in investing in mutual relationships: the Sassolino conflict, the corner is called "the red bench", la panchina rossa.

Ten years later, what happened to those pupils that argued on the red bench?

On 5.11.22 Fondazione Intro gathered at the school 17 teenagers (11 girls and 6 boys, from 12 to 15 years) to spend an afternoon together, facilitated by education professionals and with the help of actors of the Theatre of the Oppressed (by Augusto Boal).



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The work - conducted by Dr Lussignoli - has gone through a long phase of warm-up and mutual recognition. The teenagers have attended the same Montessori kindergarten, but they do not live in the same village, and, above all, they have not seen each other for many years. Except for a few cases, they didn't remember each other. The memories of classmates and school events seemed too distant; at the beginning, the only shared element was the memory of the teacher Annalisa (the Montessori pedagogue Annalisa Schirato, who accompanied this process).

So some "icebreaker" games were used initially (the cross-greeting, "if I were"...), which gradually put the theme of the conflict at the center; and **from the beginning, they showed a good capacity for introspection and reflexivity.**

In the second phase, the teens were divided into subgroups, and they were asked to share an episode of conflict in which they were involved with other peers and classmates.

The story of the quarrels has highlighted that **the teens are not moved by the desire to find a culprit: they do not place themselves in an accusatory way towards the other, and they do not even absolve themselves but are moved above all by the desire to understand what happened.**

Teens can also read their behaviour honestly. Even if they were trained in the past to handle the quarrel, this has not disappeared, and continues to express itself through the impulsiveness typical of adolescence; but after the quarrel comes the need to understand and the attempt to confront each other. In the anecdotes told by the teens, **the interest in preserving friendship prevails: the relationship is more important than the quarrel.**

Each group chose its own favorite quarrel story and then, all together, one was chosen only to be "staged", with the help of the actors of the Theatre of the Oppressed.

The episode chosen was about a girl trying to involve a friend who tended to isolate herself. The quarrel arises from the fact that the attempt to



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involve her seems to accentuate her condition of isolation in the group, triggering her reaction.

In this phase, the actors will replace the classmates "in playing" the quarrel, after having tried it in private.

Then the facilitator will block the scene several times, asking the actors to express the thoughts and emotions lived at that moment, and asking the guys to express their opinions on what was observed.

Their observations revealed the need **to understand each other, to listen first to themselves** - but without being too focused on themselves and their feelings, and without being fixed on their position - **to be able to listen to the other**.

Then a volunteer was asked to replace one of the actors to play a character in the quarrel, trying to point out alternative ways to manage the conflict.

Through substitution one realises **how easy it is to bring elements of judgement into the conflict** - "I explain to you how things are".

Gradually it is noticed that the guys shift their attention to the need to clarify themselves, and then take the path of possible reconciliation between friends with the final phrase "If you want we can meet another time, only us...".

The initial claim to include in the group the isolated girl - the element that gave rise to the conflict - is abandoned; instead, we move on to the maintenance of the relationship, the friendship of two, probably more sustainable in this situation.

Then the facilitator invited the teens to recover the memories of their quarrels in kindergarten, and they proved that in reality, they were very lively, not only concerning anecdotes but above all concerning deep experiences. **The children naturally photographed the steps for managing the conflict**, an important source of current skills.

The first step is always **emotional decantation, to manage the peak of emotions**.

The second is **to listen to the point of view of the other**, letting him/her speak without interruption, even if you disagree.



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The need for an agreement is not so clear, replaced by the desire to take care of the relationship instead.

Finally, the teens make **no mention of the role of the adult** in these conflicts: the conflict is of those who quarrel, and the adult is in the background if not completely disappeared.

The final part of the meeting was an explosion of enthusiasm, due to the contact with the Montessori materials of the school and the environment found, but also as a reaction to the hard work done in the afternoon.

The experience represented an important moment of **verification of the long-term effects of the use of a method for arguing at school with 3-4-year-old children.**

It was also **a significant opportunity to give back to the teens involved in the skills acquired.** With the help of a standard questionnaire, routinely administered by the CPP, the conflicting competence self-perceived by the teens, with medium/ high results that confirm what emerged during the day.

The videos obtained, [one lasting about 20'](#), or another about 11' [here](#), can be used for awareness and dissemination purposes. ([Original version](#))

The value of the video lies above all in highlighting **the great potential of children in conflict management, if adequately accompanied: by the educational methods of conflict management in school work, and if applied continuously generate significant and lasting relational skills.**

It would, of course, be useful to gather further evidence to support these conclusions. On the other hand, the model of intervention realized is replicable by other organizations engaged in the dissemination of educational management of peer conflicts, both within the Consortium Erasmus+ "Argue at school", and outside. And it would be also really interesting to highlight the opinions and beliefs of teens about quarrels when they didn't receive any kind of training and support at school, to compare the two situations: with a method or without a method.



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Recommendations

Is there in your school a method for helping children and students to learn when they quarrel? The main recommendation is to organise schools to be able to answer: yes, there is!

More than one method is needed for students from 2 to 18 years old. All of them may find the same obstacle: often adults' beliefs are based on the idea that students may deserve punishment, and teachers should find the solution for children's conflict because they cannot do it with justice.

The three methods show that if the school organise itself with a method, children may learn how to live with others and take care of relationships. We know that methods work and we produced many videos to make it easier to believe it.

It is important to notice differences between methods concerning students' age. Peer mediation, a strong method for older students, needs more teacher training and supervision compared to the Litigare Bene method, which works in kindergarten and Primary school after a few hours of training. Narration and Reflection Methodology, addressed to Secondary school students and teachers, needs a lot of preparation and training. It is not rare to find Secondary schools working with Debate methodology, about controversy and discussions, not quarrels. This shows that many efforts are addressed to older students.

But the key age is 2-10. Small children have great abilities to self-regulate their quarrels. Research shows that before the Litigare Bene experiment and after, when the adult does not intervene, children often resolve the quarrel on their own. Before the experimentation, if the adult intervenes in a corrective way, everything freezes and the quarrel remains frozen without any evolution in 92% of cases. Working on that 92% of corrective interventions by teachers may increase important learning opportunities, stop corrective interventions in children's quarrels, which make the quarrel remain frozen without any evolution, is a key recommendation.

Sassolino's experience shows that 3-5 year-old children may learn skills very deeply rooted. Nobody in the group of 17 teens misunderstood the request to tell about a quarrel, telling about a violent situation. They seem to have fully understood what is the difference between conflict and violence. They are interested in expressing themselves and listening to the others.



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It is important to notice that our fundamental points, common to all methods, are cultural, not technical. They are choices, not only knowledge or competencies.

- The neutrality of the adults: students can rely on them, without fear.
- The solution (if there is any) is a finding by students, not by teachers.
- Let them live the experience of talking to each other, and sharing emotions, perspectives, and proposals, with many different tools.
- Welcome students' agreement.

Why do methods work? Teachers always respect the dignity of the students, trust them, trust their learning capabilities, rely on their social instincts, welcome their creativity, and take care of relationships. Compared to traditional habits related to children quarrelling, this is a strong innovation.

The school shall make its choice. The first step is to discuss this issue in Teachers' Councils, parents' associations, communities, Universities, etc.

If possible, **the whole school** shall make the choice, not every single teacher when the situation occurs. Children, who have grown up with a method starting from kindergarten, may find it easy to learn Peer mediation when they are 11 years old. But if "trained" students go to Secondary school and find there the old rule that gives detention to students who quarrel, it is a problem.

Here is a list of messages from the partners. All of them **recommend methods for arguing at school as a means to prevent violence**.

1. **No one can be forced to use a method if they don't want to.** Associations and organizations dealing with education, the Ministry of Education, Universities that educate future teachers, Parents associations, and Media may be involved to make methods known and more transferable.
2. It would be good to create a **network of teachers using methods** for arguing at school.
3. Forum mirotvorna škola is a network in Croatia. Through the methods, children get tools and life skills that make them aware of the difference between conflict as an everyday occurrence and violence as an unacceptable form of behaviour.



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4. **Heads of schools** have substantial impacts on the school climate and culture, teacher well-being and students' school success. The role of the Head of School is therefore to create a **safe learning environment where teachers feel empowered** to make use of a method, like the Friendships Cards, to help students deal with conflicts. S/he must also allow teachers to attend training so that they are able to use the cards in their everyday lessons. At present, a pilot study has been carried out with a primary school to train all the teachers on how to use the tool so that a whole school approach to social and emotional learning and dealing with conflicts is adopted. When this tool is embedded within the daily lives of students, students have the opportunity to learn to deal with conflicts that arise daily.
5. Friendship cards are designed to serve as a preventive and interventive tool and focus on the development of pro-social skills, especially emotional literacy, empathy, communication skills, and conflict resolution. These skills help students find nonviolent ways to handle their conflicts and, thereby, may decrease violent behaviour. The cards, therefore, help them to deconstruct and reconstruct messages or ideas they have about violence and conflict. Since the cards focus a lot on emotional awareness, the cards are a good tool to use for anger management since they provide a non-threatening space where students can talk about their anger and other emotions that the conflict causes, how to deal with these emotions, and how to tap these emotions to move forward.
6. **The school principal** supports preventive programs and nonviolent conflict resolution through the Litigare Bene method (1-4 grade) and mediation. He gets acquainted with the work methodology and provides the means for the professional development of teachers. In Croatia, schools have a pedagogic office. The pedagogue documents and tracks how to carry out activities to educate students who are facing mediation for the first time. The role of **the school pedagogue** is to coordinate between the teachers, parents, and students in implementing the method, take care of education, and motivate and encourage the implementation of the methods. In collaboration with the teachers, the pedagogue designs workshops for conducting peer mediation and the Litigare Bene method.



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7. **The Teachers' Council** supports the method and is further educated in its application (new members of the Council undergo the education).
8. Mediation is a method of preventive programme and, in its fundamental process, acts as a preventative programme in combating violence.
9. The method may be used to prevent violence. First, if **students and teachers** see that a conflict could be escalating, they have means to stop the conflict and take steps towards peer mediation or some other method used in the school. Secondly, mediation as a process is de-escalating and if a solution is reached, the violence is prevented. And thirdly, the experience that the conflict is possible to solve in win/win, prevents future violence, because children learn that all can get what they need and develop attitudes to achieve it. All this influences the culture of dealing with conflicts in school and outside the school, in the family, in free time, sports, etc. In some schools, if available funds are sufficient, a 3-day training for parents of peer mediators is organised, so that parents understand the model and learn the same skills as children and can therefore support them better and even change the way conflicts are solved within the family. This programme is developed for schools. Nevertheless, similar programs are used for educating teachers, students, parents, trainers, citizens, etc. for using mediation formally and informally. All participants of the programme (students, teachers, ...) can use the method everywhere in an informal way (following the process, using skills).
10. **The school pedagogue** is included in the whole process, can refer cases to the mediation club, and provides expert support for teachers who take over the education of new generations of peer mediators. Together with **the school psychologist**, she/he can give training for peer mediators, parents, and school staff when needed.
11. After learning about the mediation method, **the students' families** support the implementation of the method in the educational process and try to implement it in resolving conflicts within the family.



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12. For teachers, the recommendations from partners underline the aim of **Inclusion and accessibility**. The method Litigare Bene is suitable for students with special needs because it's simple. It is more difficult for them to express themselves, but they need to be involved. More tools may be needed to include students with special needs and disabilities, it depends on the type of disability. Teachers should prepare more illustrations. Children with disabilities should have more opportunities to move.
13. Friendship Cards have been used in resource schools (schools where students with disabilities learn together) and in mainstream schools where **students with disabilities** are integrated into the class. Several resources have been developed to create a dynamic resource kit, helping children to connect and play, this includes:
 - a. Cards in various sizes A4, A5, standard (100mm 10mm), and packet size.
 - b. Digital version which may be used on an interactive whiteboard or online
 - c. Three Puppets to be used in drama 4 Multi-sensory tools including dice, hats, gloves, and sounds.

These multi-sensory tools which represent the different emotions and moves on the cards are intended to help students with special needs better recognize their emotions, promote regulation of these emotions, help them improve their focus and thus increase participation and learning.

14. In an ideal situation, the children would learn how to use the cards at school and then take a set home and **continue to play with their family (parents and siblings)**. Research shows that the family has a key role in the social and emotional development of children, especially since children learn through observation and thus can develop their socio-emotional skills with the help of their family. When parents use the cards in the home and help the children to identify and express their emotions and their thoughts, they would be exposing their children to prosocial behaviour. The use of the cards also helps in the development of a positive and open relationship between parents/or caregivers and thus conflicts are dealt with in a more calm and composed way.



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Parents and quarrels at school (and at home)

The experience developed at Sassolino - Montessori kindergarten run by Foundation INTRO, partner of the project "Arguing at school" - makes it possible to highlight **some precautions that should be taken when a school proposes to apply a systematic educational approach to conflicts** (be it the *Litigare Bene* method, the *Peer mediation*, the *Friendship Cards* or other chosen approach).

In a few words, it is possible to identify three main strategies to create an educational continuity between school and family with the focus of the quarrels between peers: caring for communication, offering opportunities for observation, proposing training moments that allow adults to explore their own experiences in this regard.

Practising an educational method of conflict management in school also makes this topic central to family **communication**.

Usually the comparison between the school and the parents is centred on the teaching method and on the educational style of the teachers; in this case the comparison must be enriched with information regarding how the quarrels in class are handled and how children and teens face it. This step is really of great importance for structuring the relationship of trust, on which the continuity between home and school is based.

Teaming up among educational figures (family and professional) allows the child to feel protected within a network of shared values and good practices.

When teachers and parents go in contrasting directions, the child or the teen, while knowing how to contextualise the different rules proposed in different environments, struggles to access more subtle levels of evolution, because they are confused by discordant adult models.

Our experience of applying an educational approach to quarrels at school (specifically the *Litigare Bene* method, one of the three analysed by the project "Arguing at school") highlighted the usefulness of informing parents about the approach even *before* the beginning of school attendance.



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It is appropriate that already during the *Open Days* created to present the school teachers explain in a simple and clear way the educational approach followed on the quarrels, so as to open the possibility to subsequent personal deepening.

Faced with methods that empower children and teens in addressing the quarrels, may arise for parents the doubt that the teacher is somehow avoiding control and educational responsibility towards the pupils, leaving them a little to themselves, including the risk of getting seriously hurt.

In this sense it is essential to ensure that parents can observe - perhaps through audiovisual material or, if possible, in person - the dynamics that take place at school in case of conflict, permitting them also to perceive the quality of the teacher's intervention.

A subsequent talk with the teachers will offer all the highlights and clarifications that the previous observation facilitates: attention to emotional education, the role of the teacher who becomes a facilitator of the dialogue, the autonomy maturing in children, the welcoming/non-judgmental attitude of the teacher with respect to emotions, but also the firmness of the intervention when it is necessary to remember the rules.

Afterwards, during the attendance at school, the occasions of quarrel between children will be very common, and therefore also the possibility to resume with parents the topic, and to satisfy their needs for deepening thanks to personal talks and assemblies.

Childhood experiences with respect to conflict lead every adult to activate automatic behaviours that are emphasised when their child is the protagonist.

The emotional component often takes over even in parents, who may tend to play the role of judge more or less magnanimous towards the litigants (especially if they are young children).

The most frequent concern in parents is to restore justice, defending the weakest; this tends to lead adults to stop the conflict by seeking the guilty, and to impose a solution, often sanctioning.

On this front to facilitate a significant change - which goes beyond the role of the school and the skills of teachers - it is appropriate to build **a real**



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training setting, led by an expert who accompanies the participants in a delicate evolutionary process.

The training asks the adult-educator to examine first of all the motivations of his usual attitude towards the conflict, in order to deconstruct it and integrate new approaches.

Through actions aimed at the recognition and emergence of the education received and the cultural system of belonging, it is possible to observe the keys that affect one's reading of conflict situations.

By tracing the autobiographical matrix of his behaviour, the parent can activate a process of personal change that will accompany him/her to mature new educational and relational skills.

Parents will then be provided with information related to the needs of children and teens, the functioning of their thinking and their emotional world.

To follow, will be exposed and deepened the methodological steps required to the adult to facilitate the conflicts between children and teens.

Frequently, in these years of activity with children and families, we have seen spread the educational approach to quarrels practised at school within the home, even in daily routine.

In the same way, approaching this issue for their children can motivate parents to address the focus of their own conflicting skills, through more personal paths.

In short, helping children and teens to address the quarrels between them makes grow... even adults!



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Annex 1: A legacy from the EduCATE project

The foundation of this project is a question: what are we talking about when we talk about conflict?

The same question has been at the center of the work of a previous Erasmus+ Project, with 6 partners. During 2015-18 EdUCATe Consortium produced many Intellectual Outputs, and it is useful to start here from a few pages that are a result of a long and shared work.

Do we all agree on eleven common assumptions regarding conflict and nonviolent conflict transformation in educational settings, written by EdUCATe?

Arguing at School Project is grateful towards EdUCATe (European nonviolent Conflict transformation for educators: Advocacy and Training), a European Strategic Partnership project (n° 2015-1-FR01-KA201-015318). Three of the 10 partners, CPP, CPO, and Skola Ivana Gorana Kovačića, met first time in 2017 inside the Learning and Training Activity organised inside EdUCATe, which included the Litigare Bene method.

But it is important to share a bigger legacy from the work done during 2015-18, about the concept we are working on with very practical means. Before entering into the merits of the results of the new project, it is also useful to share the fundamental concepts that are the basis of the very possibility of planning a pedagogical intervention on quarrels at school.

These pages are a quote from EdUCATe's Intellectual Output: *Teacher & conflict: where are we? State of the Art Report on Teacher training on Nonviolent conflict transformation in Europe* (2018) Authors: Ilse Hakvoort, Arja Kostiainen, Elena Passerini, Cécile Barbeito, Ivana Cosic, Marjolein Delvou, Magda Hennebo, Christian Renoux:

To find a common language for the diverse conceptualizations and perspectives on the concepts of conflict, conflict transformation, and nonviolence among the partners and to make it easier for their potential audience, we found it useful to work within a conceptual framework that focuses on discussions arising from ideas around conflict and conflict transformation, one that also takes into account the disciplinary background for studying conflict within educational settings.



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Every project partner has experienced that the people we dialogue with (whether a colleague in conflict transformation education, a teacher, a pupil, a politician, or decision-makers on educational matters) interpret conflict, violence, conflict transformation, and nonviolence slightly or largely differently from their understanding. It could be said that this is a reflection of the international and national discourses on conflict and conflict transformation in education, as their disciplinary approaches are scattered, and lack clarity and a united language. Over the last 10-20 years, whether as a researcher and/or teacher trainer, every project member has contributed to finding a common language by explaining the concepts they use themselves.

For our target audience, the European teachers and student teachers, to develop knowledge and skills to handle classroom and school conflicts nonviolently and constructively, they need to understand the central ideas behind the jargon.

Thus, in our conceptual framework, we focus on the notions of conflict and violence as well as on the disciplinary perspectives that inform research on conflict, violence, and nonviolence in educational settings framing our thinking. From there, we develop 11 assumptions about the notions of conflict and conflict transformation shared by all partner organisations. These assumptions are regarded as shared knowledge. They are used as a base for our reasoning, and therefore they will not be tested.

The concept of conflict

As this project brought together partners from different European countries, all with experience in conflict transformation education for teachers, each partner came to the project with an idea of what conflict represents for them. We quickly noticed that our understanding of conflict and nonviolence diverged. As a case in point, the Italian language treats the words conflict and war as synonyms, whereas this is not the case with the other partners' languages. Nevertheless, this has made us more reflective on the differences between what we understand as war and what we understand as conflict. For example, the English language usually describes war as armed conflict, assuming that war would be just another type of conflict.

Morton Deutsch (1973) has argued that conflict can have constructive as well as destructive potential. We found it a good starting point to highlight the differences between the understanding of conflict and war, in that conflict is a necessary part of life that one manages skillfully, whereas war is



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not. Thus, the kinds of knowledge and skills that we are interested in sharing through this project would focus on the transformation of conflict situations that are a natural part of school life, as they shape relationships, emotions, interests, and behaviours. Conflict happens in every organisation and every relationship, among children and between parents and children. If we consider conflicts to be expressions of differences in interests, opinions, needs, and wishes (following scholars like Bickmore, 2002, 2004; Deutsch, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Lederach, 2003; Valsiner & Cairns, 1992; Cahn & Abigail, 2013), then we can understand conflicts as calls for learning (e.g., Hakvoort, 2002; Hakvoort & Olsson, 2014), for personal and social development, and as opportunities for change. Overcoming conflicts skillfully can lead to increased learning.

It is the context in which pupils, teachers, and other actors in the school operate that shapes the nature of the conflict and its transformation. Thus, this report describes how different European countries organise support for their teachers and teacher trainees to acquire and maintain the knowledge and skills that lead to nonviolent conflict transformation.

Scholarly work on conflict often positions it as an interaction between at least two parties in which one party has needs, ideas, or desires he or she considers too important to give up, and finds their fulfilment blocked by another party (e.g., Cahn & Abigail, 2013; Davies, 2004). Thus, although conflict may occur with somebody, it may feel as against somebody. It can lead to feelings of separation from the other. Reactions to the conflict may manifest themselves as attitudes toward a perceived opponent; feelings of disagreement, incompatibility, and injustice; or behaviourally as words and deeds (Novara, 2011). Feelings like anger, fear, impotence, loneliness, and unhappiness are also connected with conflict (Novara 2011).

The participating parties are often not conscious of those feelings and are usually not able to name them and recognise them as emotions and not attacks.

Scholars in the field of handling conflicts have used a variety of related terms to explain conflicts. Some of those concepts are prevention and escalation (Glasl, 1997), conflict transformation (Galtung 1996; Lederach, 2003), and conflict resolution (Cohen, 2005; Bickmore, 2002; Deutsch, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Most scholars, independent of the term used, find that conflicts are a natural part of life, and learning opportunities and will invariably occur in school settings. For our project, we chose to work with the concept of conflict transformation. The notion of constructive conflict transformation implies knowledge and skills that highlight the



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constructive and positive aspects of conflicts while mitigating the negative ones. It focuses on the notion of relation rather than separateness in order to bring about new possibilities and learning. [...]

The Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN General Assembly for 2015-2030

Conflict transformation in school settings

At present theoretical roots and traces of nonviolent and constructive conflict transformation in educational settings are commonly found in research and programs from social psychology (e.g., Coleman, Deutsch & Marcus, 2014; Johnson & Johnson, 1996), developmental psychology (Piaget, 1932; Selman, 1971; Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1935), humanistic psychology (e.g., in particular need theory, Maslow, 1954; Burton, 1966), psychoanalytic (Miller, 1997; Fornari, 2011; Bion, 1961), and system theory (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979; von Bertalanffy, 1968). What they all have in common is that they see conflicts as opportunities for change, learning, innovation, and creative thinking.

When it comes to approaching conflict transformation, it needs to be noted that the partners in this EU project vary in their use of related terms. For example, the Swedish partner finds the terms prevention and escalation useful because of its need to position itself in relation to the dominant emphasis in Swedish education on law violations, harassment, and discrimination. The Croatian partner uses a bottom-up approach led by the question “What will teachers need to be good teachers in a world in which new types of conflicts occur and develop daily?” On the other hand, the Italian partner is concerned with understanding the difference between violence, mismanaged conflict and well-managed conflict. A good understanding would allow teachers to get out of the logic of discipline and punishment and with this provide children and adults an environment to argue well, develop their skills to live together, being able to learn from problems and difficulties, try to stem violence and effectively establish limits to mismanaging conflicts.

Children can have a natural propensity toward conflict transformation and are usually very good at handling their conflicts without an adult's intervention. When this is not the case, we expect teachers to facilitate pupils' conflict transformation in the best possible ways. The existence of conflicts in schools can be regarded in various ways, e.g. as an effort towards cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 1996), as necessary changes (Lederach, 2003), and for learning and development (Shartz & Hartrup,



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1992). When teachers manage to support and facilitate pupils through conflicts to express their goals, needs and feelings constructively (Deutsch, 1949, 2014), and discuss possible ways to meet individual different goals, needs and feelings, then it is considered that those situations are handled nonviolently and can be transformed into deeper learning. Teachers must be able to handle conflicts constructively with other adults, as they have the responsibility to facilitate their pupils' conflicts.

Thus, conflict transformation for us represents strategies and processes that teachers use to facilitate pupils to listen to motives, thoughts, and feelings concerning the other person's viewpoint of the situation and to better understand their motives, thoughts, and feelings.

Thus, we expect teacher training to help teachers develop an ability to explore unknown and sometimes repellent motives, thoughts, values, and feelings and to model this ability with their pupils. All this serves to develop more understanding and better alternatives. For a teacher to be able to model nonviolent conflict transformation, it implies that they can use

their knowledge and skills to handle even the conflicts they encounter with their colleagues and other adults (like parents) in a constructive and nonviolent way.

For conflict transformation to have long-lasting effects (sustainable outcomes), teachers and pupils need to develop their knowledge and skills for constructively managing the conflicts they encounter.

Assumptions

Although the partners in this European project base their work on the ideas and perspectives they have developed over many years, they all agree on eleven common assumptions regarding conflict and nonviolent conflict transformation in educational settings. The first four assumptions are related to the concept of conflict, while the seven other assumptions relate to conflict and learning, particularly in formal school environments:

1. **Assumption One:** The concept of conflict is a multifaceted concept.
2. **Assumption Two:** Conflict is a natural part of life and education can impact the ways in which conflict is transformed.
3. **Assumption Three:** Conflicts occur on micro, meso, or macro levels of society. Gender, race, or ethnicity and similar identity frames form the macro realm and can be seen as a type of conflict imposed by societal or cultural rules and conventions. Conflicts on the macro level can inform micro-level conflicts.



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4. **Assumption Four:** Conflict parties are interdependent in one way or another; Otherwise, they would not be affected by conflict. The ways in which conflicting parties react depends on how they perceive both the situation and their counterpart(s).
5. **Assumption Five:** Conflict is an inherently dynamic process. Conflictual situations and their actors will change all the time. A conflicting relationship can develop into a mature form of relationship.
6. **Assumption Six:** Conflict transformation education is an opportunity to learn and develop. This is deeply rooted in the idea that a school is a place for learning.
Since conflict is a learning opportunity, it should be dealt with in schools.
7. **Assumption Seven:** Conflict transformation education for teachers needs to focus on an understanding of the cultural and organisational context in which conflicts take place and provide teachers with tools and knowledge to manage them rather than focusing only on resolving an immediate conflict.
8. **Assumption Eight:** Pupils' voices must be heard. Conflict transformation education needs to take into account how pupils look at the world, allowing multiple perspectives to come forward instead of imposing an adult perspective. Consequently, conflict transformation education must actively acknowledge, seek, and incorporate multiple perspectives.
9. **Assumption Nine:** Conflict transformation should include an emancipatory dimension. Although the teacher operates as an authority figure within the formal school settings, it is important to pay attention to transforming conflicts, in which pupils are involved, in ways that respect pupils' dignity and their value as a person in equal measure as the value and dignity of teachers.
10. **Assumption Ten:** Schooling provides unique circumstances and catalysts for conflicts. As educational challenges for students, teachers, parents, and administrators change, they constantly introduce new and unpredictable types of micro-level conflicts. Thus, teachers may be faced with handling conflicts for which no blueprints exist yet.
11. **Assumption Eleven:** Conflict transformation is more effective if its measures are embodied within the whole school and influence all the decisions made (such as rules, restorative sanctions, participation, and cooperation between teachers).



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You can find the complete document of EduCATE's project [here](#).

Do you agree with EduCATE's common Assumption? You can share your opinion with us [here](#).

Annex 2: La Metodologia della Narrazione e della Riflessione/ Narration and Reflection Methodology

The MNR (Metodologia della Narrazione e della Riflessione – Narration and Reflection Methodology) is a structured practice of managing a classroom that aims to foster communication within it through individual reflection and group dialogue, conducted around prepared materials. The MNR aims at the development of relational skills characterised by openness, willingness to listen, trust, respect for different points of view, sharing, and appreciation of differences. This should positively impact each person's resources to deal with difficulties in interpersonal relationships and to manage conflicts inside and outside the classroom. The MNR was developed after research conducted in 2002 and 2005 in North Italy (Genoa) which highlighted

1. the need for children to be heard;
2. the sense of loneliness of the teachers in dealing with conflicts.

Thus, the MNR consists of a session (100-120 minutes). Two teachers (facilitator and observer) should be present. The session is structured in different phases:

1. Individual reading of a sheet in which a text presents a conflicting situation.
2. Small group guided reflection on the situation presented in the text. The sheet also presents a set of questions that the students can discuss.
3. Plenary focus group phase: the students, in a plenary session, discuss the situation of the text, facilitated by the teacher.
4. Restitution session: the teacher will summarise the different points that emerged during the discussion.

The focus group transforms the reflection into a confrontation operation, based on problematization, investigation, and dialogue, and promotes the cognitive process of the class group as a research community. Some key aspects that teachers/facilitators should keep in mind are:



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- It is not possible to indicate a priori the course of the focus group as it depends on infinite variables, individual situations, and the group dynamics that manifest themselves. The facilitator can only recall the general rules of group management like speaking turns.
- The facilitator's conduction style is very important. The facilitator should obtain the attention and willingness to listen to each other, trying to get all or most of the students to intervene, making his/her stimulus a facilitating and not a barrier effect.
- The facilitator must avoid a directive style and should follow a Socratic style of facilitation, which enhances the group's resources and creates equal and widespread participation.
- The facilitator should stand in the center of the classroom near the students, to initiate equal communication. He/she should manage non-verbal communication: smiles, plays, gives words, communicates active listening, asks open questions, and empathises with the group.
- The facilitator must be flexible to adapt to various situations.

The MNR was born in the school setting but, over the years, it has been used to address issues or problems of various kinds, especially with parents. The MNR has been and will be used to support school inclusion, prevent discomfort and drop-out in schools, and develop pathways for citizenship/civic education. It has also been used for Pathways to Orientation and Transversal Skills (PCTO). During the COVID emergency, the use of the MNR as a supplementary activity to the online didactic was successfully experimented with, although on-site presence in the MNR techniques remains a prerequisite. [More information is available here](#),

References: Promuovere la socialità a scuola - La Metodologia della Narrazione e della Riflessione, Randazzo G., Peccenini R., Russo M., Vacatello M.T., Edizioni scolastiche, Bruno Mondadori, Milano, N°23, giugno 2009, da p. 11 a p.14.

Other resources are available [here](#)