Chapter 10

The Teaching of Non-Violence in Italian Schools: Mediation and Aikido in Conflict Prevention

Nicoletta Casale
Independent Researcher, Italy

Alessia Cerchia
Independent Researcher, Italy

Luca Dal Pubel
Independent Researcher, USA

ABSTRACT

Phenomena of conflicts among students may lead to critical situations, like isolation, violence and school dropout, especially if poorly managed. In Italy, a group of professionals, lawyers and mediators, has developed a training program called School of Mediation, Mediation for School (SMS) to provide students with more adequate and modern tools to manage their relationships with peers and adults. The SMS project originates from the belief that what determines the most crisis situations are not discriminations or conflicts themselves, but rather the way we deal with them. During the training program professionals have resorted to mediation tools and aikido, a Japanese martial art, to engage students both intellectually and physically. The project, to date, has involved more than 200 students with important results.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-2209-6.ch010
INTRODUCTION

Italy, as many other European countries are witnessing, more frequent phenomena of relationship conflicts and crises among students of all ages that are often poorly managed, and may lead to difficult and critical situations, such as social isolation, acts of violence and premature school dropouts.

According to the Italian Ministry of Education's official guidelines that were recently issued the goal of the Ministry is to fight the aforesaid phenomena; violence in school environments. The Ministry of Education (2015) noted that violent episodes in schools:

*Are increasingly configured as an expression of lack of tolerance and non-acceptance of those who are different for ethnicity, religion, psycho-physical attitudes, gender identity, sexual orientation and particular familiar contexts: victims of bullying are, increasingly often, teenagers on which the burden stereotypes stems from discriminatory prejudices. It’s in misinformation and prejudice that lurk phenomena of juvenile deviance may turn into acts of generic violence or more structured actions of bullying. (p. 3)*

Although attention has been given to the problem, unfortunately, the overall efforts invested to deal with school violence are too often inadequate or insufficient. Some of the weaknesses of the implementation are wide diversity between the same projects, lack of sharing of a common thread, and lack or absence of communication between institutional and private subjects, all with inefficient use of the available resources.

The Italian legislator often only takes actions in communicating emergency situations that are pointed out by shocking reports in the news and social media, such as the recent suicide attempt of a 12 year old girl, who was subjected to acts of violence and mockery by her schoolmates. In fact, the recent draft law n. 3139/2016 approved by the Italian parliament, which followed this tragic event, aims at introducing the so-called “bullying crime” into the Italian legal system; it also focuses on repression of the phenomenon, rather than on effective understanding and prevention by educating young people.

To respond to the urgent need of educating young students to conflict prevention and management, the “SMS Project - School of mediation, mediation for school”, was born from a simple and yet important idea: to talk with students about how they manage their important relationships and the conflicts that can arise in everyday life; in classrooms, in families and with friends, in such a way that leads to reflection and positive transforming conflict resolution.

*The main challenge of the creators of the SMS project, namely mediators and lawyers, was to give a (small) contribution to the profound change in a dominant culture of relationships and emotions management. A change of conflict management skills that are still far from full implementation is becoming increasingly urgent and necessary. (Faget, 2010)*

The SMS project originated from the shared belief that what really determines the most relevant situations of crisis are not the discriminations or conflicts themselves, but rather the way we deal with them, and acknowledging that conflicts are a natural part of human relations and an aspect of life we have to deal with. The project began with the premise that since young people are often victims or protagonists of conflicts, therefore they may be suitable facilitators for positive solutions to peer conflict.

The goal of the SMS Project includes several components: making the students of Italian schools positive and active key players of peer conflict, providing students with the useful tools to recognize,