

‘Could Mediation Be Used To Manage Bullying in DEIS Irish  
Primary Schools?’

by

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- All sources have been reported and acknowledged.
- This dissertation has not been submitted entirely or in parts for any degree or other qualification.

Signed

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on answering the question: Could mediation be used to manage bullying in DEIS Irish Primary Schools?.

Using a two-phase sequential exploratory research design with an induction approach and a pragmatic philosophy, the following objectives were intended to be covered: To analyse the mediation process and its potential use to manage bullying within a primary school context. To find out the current situation of DEIS primary schools in Ireland regarding bullying management and their knowledge regarding mediation. To outline how mediation could be used to manage and prevent bullying in DEIS primary schools in Ireland.

In the first phase, 19 studies in relation to bullying and mediation in schools, from the year 2000-2020 with the exception of two studies from 1996 were included due to their relevance. These studies were reviewed using a thematic analysis. In the second phase, an online survey intended to explore the current situation regarding bullying and mediation in the 95 DEIS Primary Schools added to the DEIS program in 2017. The low rate of response of 10.5% did not allow to drawn meaningful results but provided insight into the need for further research.

Findings were that mediation had been used in an educational context in countries like USA and Canada with the modality of Peer Mediation, meaning a student acts as the mediator, and this showed to be very effective in managing bullying conflicts. There are other more methods for managing bullying that proved to be effective, nevertheless, they do not offer the social skills that mediation provides; therefore this study supports the use of mediation and outlines an integrative mediation strategy to manage bullying in DEIS Primary Schools based in the findings of this analysis.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

ADR: Alternative Disputes Resolution	17, 58
DEIS : Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools	passim
OBPP: Olweus Bullying Preventive Program	passim

## **Introduction**

Being a Master student of Alternative Dispute Resolutions gave me the opportunity to have a closer look at what mediation is. This experience made me gain insight into the process and all the social skills one could learn from it and their potential use in future conflicts. With this motivation, I decided to explore how this knowledge could be available for everyone from a young age, especially to those in socio-economical disadvantaged areas and if it could be effective in managing conflicts like bullying. For these reasons, the target population was the DEIS Primary Schools in Ireland.

DEIS Schools, refer to a program that aims to address the educational need of children from socio-economical disadvantages in Ireland. The decision to use DEIS Primary Schools was made after considering three aspects:

1. Schools are the best platform for the purposes of making mediation available for everyone since the basic level of education in Ireland is free and mandatory.
2. The age in which children start primary schools.
3. DEIS Schools being schools with children from socio-economical disadvantaged communities.

Due to the lack of research on mediation in a scholarly context in Ireland, this study was necessary to explore what is the current situation regarding bullying and mediation in primary schools in Ireland and if mediation could be integrated into the Irish educational context.

The question this study intends to answer is: Could Mediation be used to manage bullying in DEIS Irish primary schools?. For this purpose, the aim was to critically analyse if mediation could be used to manage bullying within Irish DEIS primary schools.

Three objectives were included as follows:

1. To analyse the mediation process and its potential use to manage bullying within a primary school context.



2. To find out the current situation of DEIS primary schools in Ireland regarding bullying management and their knowledge regarding mediation.
3. To outline how mediation could be used to manage and prevent bullying in DEIS primary schools in Ireland.

Using a sequential exploratory research design with an induction approach, the study was divided into two phases. The first phase gathered and analysed qualitative data, 19 studies related to mediation in primary schools, bullying management in schools and psychological benefits of mediation, conducted from 2000 to 2020, adding 2 studies from 1996 due to its high relevance, were analysed using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second phase, an instrument of a self-completed, online survey intended to collect primary quantitative data from the DEIS Irish Primary Schools, sampling the 95 DEIS Primary Schools adopted in 2017.

The conclusions for the first phase confirmed that mediation could and is indeed used in primary schools in several countries of the world, using a modality called Peer Mediation, in which a student previously trained acts as the mediator, having effective results managing bullying (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; 2001; Bickmore, 2002; Cremin, 2002; Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuess, 2007). One meta-analysis reported that “working with peers” (categorization for peer mediation, peer mentoring and bystander intervention), is not effective in managing bullying, however, the results of this meta-analysis regarding peer mediation are questionable due to the lack of specificity to evaluate each method of “working with peers” (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

Unfortunately, the low rate of response for the second phase (10.5%), did not allow to draw meaningful results. Reasons for this may include the lockdown of Ireland in an attempt to fight the current Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, from the ten responses received, six respondents referred to be using mediation already, indicating the need for further and deeper research.

From the conclusions drawn of this data, an integrative mediation strategy to manage bullying in DEIS Primary Schools was outlined and included in this text.

## **Chapter 1. Literature Review**

### **1.1 Bullying in schools**

The problem of bullying in schools had been studied for decades. As the potential consequences of bullying could even cost pupils' lives (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010), it is vital for schools to acknowledge it and provide proper management and care to the students involved, as well to work towards the prevention and the promotion of a peaceful school climate (Olweus & Limber, 2010).

In Ireland, according to a meta-analysis referred in Foody et al. (2018), it is mentioned that 22.4% of students in primary schools and 11.8% in post-primary schools stated to be victims of bullying in 2017 (Foody, Murphy, Downes, & O'Higgins Norman, 2018).

While the statistics in this study are not alarming, bullying is not an issue that affects only the victims. Witnesses of bullying scenes and even the students who bully, suffer in different degree of the negative consequences of this behavior, affecting the climate of the classrooms and consequently the climate of the school. That's the moment when bullying becomes alarming, even affecting the achievement and level of education of the schools as a whole (Sourander, et al., 2007; Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

### **1.2 What is Bullying?**

The definition of bullying is continually evolving and changing. Until today there is not an absolute definition of bullying. Nevertheless, in the discussion of bullying, most of the time, there is agreement on the conditional factors of frequency and power imbalance in relation to the bully and the victim/victims relationship that distinguish bullying from harassment (A. Volk, V. Dane, & Zopito A., 2014).

One of the most cited definitions of bullying and an essential reference on the subject, according to A. Volk et al. (2014), is the one that Dan Olweus, one of the principal authors in this subject, offered in 1970.

This definition states that a student is being bullied when he or she is exposed to negative actions from one or more students, repeatedly over time. Meaning by negative actions to inflict injury or discomfort carried out either by physical contact, words, or making faces, or mean gestures, or in other ways such as intentional exclusion from a group. He implies that this behavior of intentional harm follows an imbalance of power, either real or perceived (Olweus D. A., 2010).

Bullying can also involve name calling, having rumors spread about the victim and intention to cause fear or distress. School bullying includes episodes that could take place on the way to school and the way back (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

This definition, which is the foundation to understand bullying, states a frequency in which the bully picks up on the victim repeatedly over time, as a potential consequence of a power imbalance. The discussion is, what happens when harmful material is put up in cyberspace once, but could be access numerous times and potentially replicated, even if it is only one time, by many others. Is this considered bullying? (Corcoran & Mc Guckin, 2014).

Other researchers argue that the harmful material being replicated by more people, falls into the category of repetition and that power imbalance does not have to be necessary a physical size or social status, but could be represented by technology access or knowledge and even anonymity and therefore one-time action online can be considered bullying (Corcoran & Mc Guckin, 2014).

Violence and aggression can occur in school without necessarily involve bullying behavior, but bullying could involve violence and aggression (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

In Ireland in accordance with the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 and the guidelines issued by the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), all schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy within the framework of their overall code of behavior (Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

In such document, there is an open recognition of the negative consequences that bullying behavior has on the quality of education. They acknowledge that bullying has short-term and long- term

effects on the physical and mental well-being of the students and thus the need to treat it and prevent it (Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

The Department of Education and Skills of Ireland had standardized a definition of bullying. According to this definition, bullying is ‘an unwanted negative behavior that could be express either verbally, physically or psychologically that is carried out by an individual or a group against another group or individual’ (Department of Education and Skills, 2010). This negative behavior is repeated over time. Different types of bullying are listed in this definition, such as ‘deliberate exclusion, malicious gossip or other forms of relational bullying, cyber-bullying, homophobic or any kind of identity-based bullying, racism, or bullying based on a person member of the Traveler community’, as well as bullying to those with disabilities or special educational needs (Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

In terms of cyberbullying, the negative behavior does not necessarily have to be repeated over time, since one single offensive, shameful or hurtful public message, statement or image published on a social network or another public forum, could be viewed by other public and replicated unlimited times. Therefore a one-time action in this regard is considered bullying (Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

The anti-bullying policy acknowledges the wide range impact that bullying behavior has, affecting people inside and outside the school. There are more people affected, out of bullying behavior, than just the victim (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010) .

As a witness to an event, pupils are already in a dilemma. Students experience severe anxiety, either because they wish to help the student being bullied, and they are not able to, at least in an immediate moment. This experience develops feelings of guilt and frustration. Another reason in which a witness is affected is because they relate themselves with the victim, and they feel under threat. This might obey an identity-based type of bullying (Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

Pupils who engage in bullying behavior are at the higher risk of depression and anxiety disorders. These students are more likely to develop anti-social personality and are more likely to fall into law-breaking behavior, substance abuse and in the long term, when they become adults are likely to have problems with educational and occupational attainment (Sourander, et al., 2007; Department of Education and Skills, 2010).

As for the victims of bullying, the consequences on their self-esteem could be as severe as to lead to suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

It is no surprise that suicidal thoughts are found in the minds of victims of bullying, but there is evidence that the increase of suicidal thoughts is a reality for the offenders too. Over-all, victims and offenders have increased suicidal thoughts in comparison with students that have not being exposed to such experiences; this includes cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Nevertheless, is the victims who has the higher percentage of suicidal thoughts and attempts of suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Bullying in schools is a problem that affects us all as a society. Schools are a great influence to our children and is in these institutions where there should be an emphasis on developing social skills, self-regulation skills and conflict management skills, so in this way future generations can benefit from this tools and as a result of these practices, living in a more respectful and dialogue-oriented society could be far from a dream and become a reality and violence, discrimination and hateful behaviors are disowned (Craig & Don, 2009; Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

Over-all in the definitions presented, the main difference between bullying and harassment is the frequency of the negative behavior against the same student or group or students. It is the author's believe that prompt and early intervention should prevent incidents from repeating and therefore, bullying represents the failing of spotting and treating negative behavior. This does not mean conflict should be avoided. Conflict is a natural aspect of human interaction and self-development and can bring positive outcomes. Conflict can encourage relationships and self-

understanding, spur individuation and stifle anxieties, among other positive outcomes (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

The focus should be on how to deal with conflict constructively and let conflict appear out of competition or interests, not because of dominance or intention to harm. The use of mediation could be a positive and practical approach to educate new generations and reinstruct the way disagreements, differences and conflicts are not necessarily negative, but they are part of life and they can be manage constructively and have positive outcomes, detaching them from violence and resentful feelings (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

### **1.3 What is mediation?**

Mediation is known as to be a proactive solving problem method, with the purpose of making participants look forward to the conflict, by getting them to focus on the possible solutions instead of focusing on the problem, with the advantages of flexibility and confidentiality (Bultena, Ramser, & Tilker, 2015).

In Ireland, the definition of mediation is stated in the Mediation Act 2017, as it follows:

‘A confidential, facilitative and voluntary process in which the parties to a dispute, with the assistance of a mediator, attempt to reach a mutually acceptable agreement to resolve a dispute’ (Mediation Act, 2017).

Within this definition, the principles that distinguish mediation from other types of Alternative Dispute Resolution can be found and they are explained as follows.

It is a voluntary process (Mediation Act, 2017). This means the parties involved have agreed themselves to take their dispute to mediation. This is a fundamental principle of mediation and its effectiveness could be compromised if this principle is not respected. Parties are the decisions makers regarding the settlement of the dispute and the need for cooperation is essential for this purpose.

Mediation is a confidential process, which means that the subjects to mediation, including the mediator, are bound by this principle; this allows the participants to feel safe to disclose feelings and information with the certainty that this will not be used in any other forum. However, confidentiality can be lifted under certain circumstances where the parties disclose life threaten, child abuse or money laundry activities (Mediation Act, 2017).

The principle of neutrality refers to the role of the mediator (Mediation Act, 2017) . The mediator must remain impartial and neutral; this means the mediator needs to conduct himself free from favoritism, bias or prejudice towards the parties. The mediator must balance the power between the parties enabling communication so they can reach an agreement that is acceptable for both parties (The Association for Conflict Resolution , 2014).

Another critical characteristic of mediation is the self-determination of the parties. This principle differentiates mediation from other types of alternative dispute resolution. It means parties retain control over their decisions and they form and make voluntary choices regarding the possible solutions towards the conflict until they find a solution in which can both parties can agree (The Association for Conflict Resolution , 2014).

In other words, we could say mediation is a process in which the parties to a dispute can use the space to discuss the issues around the main problem; they can vent emotions and feelings due to its explorative nature. Participants have the opportunity to listen to each other in an organized manner lead by the mediator, which also balances the power between them, allowing both parts to feel comfortable for disclosure and, in this way, work towards an agreement.

Mediation is not only an alternative to court to settle a dispute. This process has a lot to offer on a very personal level and the earlier in life we could start learning and practicing the skills it is got to offer, the better we could contribute to building a more peaceful environment (Lawrence, 1996).

#### **1.4 Physiological benefits of Mediation**

Mediation has many advantages from which participants to mediation could benefit. According to Sanchez, (2018), a renowned Spanish lecturer of Alternative Disputes Resolutions (ADR) in the Complutense University of Madrid, mediation within a school context, is an element relevant to education programs that promotes a healthier context for students to interact and learn.

She states that mediation is a powerful tool in education to manage conflicts between students within an inclusive environment. Using mediation is a practical way to avoid existing problems from escalating and because of the agreement the parties reach, it would prevent or diminish the probabilities for future conflicts (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

According to Sanchez, mediation has the potential to be a transformative process for the participants on a personal level. Since having agreed to engage in a dynamic which purpose is to find a win-win solution, puts them already in an encouraging scenario where they are given the opportunity to put in practice skills like active listening, self-regulation, self-reflection and self-determination (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

In 1996 James K.L. Lawrence spoke about the psychological benefits of various forms of ADR, being mediation the most relevant in this regard. Mediation helps disputants improving their communication and provides them the possibility of underlying the roots of the issues (Lawrence, 1996).

Sanchez and Lawrence agree that the fact of speaking out loud about emotions and being listened to provides reassurance on the message being heard and helps to clarify the feelings towards the issue. The acceptability of expressing feelings and emotions builds up for a climate where the parties can release the tensions and discover how the issue is affecting them. This conforms a practical step to facilitate negotiation during mediation (Lawrence, 1996; Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

The perception of mediation could turn almost therapeutic for the parties, relying on the voluntariness of the process and the confidentiality that binds them, making it a safe dynamic in



which they are able to vent strong emotions. To talk about emotions can help to untangle them and track the way back from our actions to our emotions, underlying the drive of our behavior. Often there is a psychological need from one of the parties to express their emotions to the other party, to show what it means for them and how much weight a particular issue it is putting on their shoulders (Lawrence, 1996; Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

Bringing the opportunity of free expression, emotion wise, participants have the chance to explore and relate to each other's grievances and it is highly likely that they come across an understanding of the other party's side of the conflict, making it easy to reach a solution (Lawrence, 1996).

Engaging in an honest dialogue helps to release tensions and enables empathy, but most importantly, parties are more likely to apologise (Lawrence, 1996).

Lawrence remarks that using mediation, parties decide and reach their own agreement; this provides a feeling of control over their future and a sense of fairness. The result of exercising decision making and the feeling of control makes the commitment towards the agreement stronger than an imposed agreement (Lawrence, 1996).

Having into consideration that the internal process requires to identify and clarify emotions, to be able to communicate them. Having to stay quiet to listen to the other party, having to take turns to express and communicate yourself in a respectful manner, having to reason and explore solutions from which both parties could benefit. All this process is exercising and building up the skills mentioned above, active listening, self-reflection, self-regulation, empathy and self-determination (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018). The development of the skills just mentioned, is what makes mediation so valuable and so relevant to teach to children as a way to deal with conflict.

### **1.5 Why mediation could be appropriate to manage bullying in DEIS primary schools?**

According to the psychologist Craig and Don, school plays a powerful role in the comprehensive development of children (Craig & Don, 2009).

Children spend a significant part of their time in school and this is the place where they experiment and try their intellectual competences; they try their physical abilities, their social skills and experiment with their emotional development. They put to the test all their skills in order to find out if they are able to keep on with the rules and norms that family, schools and society in general, established in this world they are adapting in (Craig & Don, 2009).

Primary students in Ireland can start education from the age of 4 and they have to start their formal education by the age of 6 officially. Primary education lasts until children reach 12 years old (Citizens Information Board).

The period from 6 to 12 years old, is called middle childhood. During this period, children go through several changes; there is constantly growing and adapting in their lives (Craig & Don, 2009).

In middle childhood, children experiment the transition from home to school, where they now have to face social interaction with new children and teachers. They are exposed to a new context in which they are expected to adapt to new rules and figures of authority. They start to develop a sense of responsibility, and later in this stage, they compare themselves as part of an auto-evaluation to construct and reassure a self-concept (Craig & Don, 2009).

There is something fundamental to adulthood that starts developing during this particular time and is the conception of the right and wrong and the concepts of equity and justice (Craig & Don, 2009).

Infants in middle childhood start to be aware of social responsibility; they are growing friendships and understanding the societal norms and conventions that come with them (Craig & Don, 2009).

According to this information regarding children's development, This period of time is ideal for initiating children into positive conflict management and for pursuing them into a dialogue-oriented environment, where differences can be discussed and disagreements can be talked through. It is an excellent time to providing them with the skills to negotiate in an integrative manner when it comes

to reaching agreements (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018). This might suggest that schools may be the best scenario to provide this education.

Sanchez Garcia-Arista, in her work 'Contextualized educational Mediation' supports that mediation is an excellent help for conflict management in schools and she believes that implementing this in the education system, since students are as young as three years old, can gradually provide emotional education and conflict management skills. Abilities that will reflect naturally in other contexts such as family and community (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

With this approach to manage bullying conflict, the climate of the class is affected positively and prevents students from tolerating violent and toxic beliefs that threaten the core value of respect towards others, inside and outside school (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

Sanchez remarks that the identity construction that takes place as children grow is influenced by their context, either positive or negative, in which children learn and experiment through the interaction with others (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018). This is also supported by Craig and Don, (2009), when they discuss about the "self-conception" that takes place in the middle childhood, this self-conception refers to how, as a result of comparing and testing skills and abilities with their peers, as well as comparing the acquisition of new skills, children evaluate and build up an idea about themselves (Craig & Don, 2009).

Mediation helps to build up this type of environment, enabling dialogue, empathy and collaboration. Skills that can be acquire as a result of this practice, encouraging respect and validation and preventing the emergence of a bully (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

Classrooms can benefit from mediation as a whole. Even when mediation is a confidential process that only involves the stakeholders and the mediator, it nevertheless, sparks up the interest on how conflicts are being managed and if the conflicts are solved satisfactory and positively, the climate of the class improves and they can concentrate on their studies (Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

## **1.6 Peer Mediation in Schools**

Peer mediation is the same process as mediation, with the difference being that the third neutral person that acts as the mediator is a student, who has previously received a mediation training to serve with this purpose between other students. Peer Mediation intends to meet and respect the fundamental principles of mediation previously discussed (voluntariness, neutrality, confidentiality and self-determination) in a school context (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

Schools worldwide have adopted programs of peer mediation with high acceptance and great results regarding school culture and climate, diminishing bullying cases and harassment, as it will be next review in detail (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

The idea to provide children with adequate skills for conflict management had their roots in 1960 when all began with an initiative called 'Teaching Students to Be Peacemakers Program'. The aim of this pioneering program was to teach students about the nature of conflict and how to apply negotiation procedures to mediate conflicts between pupils and, in this way, reduce violence (Johnson & Johnson, 1996).

The program was implemented in many countries around the world, including Central and South America, Europe, Middle Este, Asia and Africa.

The peacemakers' program has a convenient approach and it clarifies that the aim is to teach students how to negotiate a conflict of interests by using an integrative approach. An integrative approach refers to negotiating an agreement that benefits both parties. A conflict of interests refers to the type of conflict in which a person's actions in order to reach a goal, interferes or blocks another person to reach their goal (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; 2001).

This systematized procedure includes the participation of the teachers and trains all students to be mediators in five steps; this includes students from elementary school to college students (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

The first step is to teach the pupils what conflict is and what is not and how could conflict potentially have a positive outcome. The second step teaches them how to negotiate, or in other words, it explains in a practical way how pupils are expected to conduct by being a participant in the mediation (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

This program is particularly descriptive and it reassures the opinions of Lawrence, (1996) and Sanchez, (2018) regarding the importance of expressing feelings and self-reflection (Lawrence, 1996; Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018). Children are expected to organize their thoughts and feelings and negotiate by describing what they want, describing how they feel trying their best to be as accurate and unambiguous as possible and describing reasons for their wants and feelings. They are expected to summarize the other party wants and feelings and they are required to come out with three possible solutions where they maximize the benefits for both parties. When they decide on one solution, the agreement must include how each party is going to conduct or specified the work they committed to do and include how they will work if future conflict appears or if there is a need to renegotiate (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

The third step teaches them how to be a mediator. In this step, whenever there is a dispute between their classmates or at a school and they are required by the disputants to mediate, the mediator must expect both parties to agree in order to proceed. Once the mediator has consent from both parties, he explains the principles of mediation in simple words (voluntariness, confidentiality, neutrality), he emphasizes the neutrality of his position and the need to be committed with whatever they agree and he helps them to negotiate. When the participants reach an agreement, the mediator formalizes it by writing up in the Mediation Report Form and gets the parties to sign it as a way to seal the commitment from both parts. The mediator keeps the form and can check later on if the agreement is working or there is a need to renegotiate (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

In the four-step, teachers are required to choose two mediators each day, so everybody can have the opportunity to mediate. This program works on the premise that every student must be trained in

how to negotiate with an integrative approach and how to conduct a mediation (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

The final step is to continue the training through the academic year in order to sharpen students' skills (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

From 1988 until the year 2000, Roger T. Johnson and David W. Johnson conducted 16 studies to find out about the effectiveness of peer mediation in schools. These studies took place in 8 different schools between the USA and Canada. Involving students from kindergarten (5 years old pupils) until ninth grade (14-15 years old pupils) (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

The results showed that before training, students resolved their disputes by insisting on position, either repeating their request and forcing the other party to comply or withdrawing from the conflict and the relationship due to the hostility of their approach. Verbal threats were often used as well of aggression and violence. Conflicts were often referred to the teachers and the results of the conflicts were perceived as a win-lose competition (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

After the training, students showed that their knowledge regarding negotiation and mediation increased dramatically and even after a year of follow up, their knowledge maintained (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

Most importantly, students were able to apply this knowledge right after training in real-life situations and the study showed that they were even using integrative negotiation to mediate conflicts in other contexts outside school (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

This study reported that trained students changed their attitudes towards conflict and became more independent in their way of managing conflict, needing less adult monitoring (Johnson & Johnson, 2001). In other words, they were showing the practice of self-regulation.

Different from the inclusive approach of the Peacemakers Program, there were more studies that follow a different approach, including only a selected group of students to train and yet aiming a positive result for the whole school (Bickmore, 2002; Cremin, 2002).

In Birmingham, Cremin, (2002) analysed three primary schools. The study surveyed pupils and interviewed teachers to collect information regarding students' self-esteem and locus of control. After this information was collected, a training was provided to children in their 5<sup>th</sup> year (10-11 years old) teaching them about how to apply mediation when conflicts in the playground and at brakes in school (Cremin, 2002).

The training consisted of teaching the students and the school staff how to mediate, using social skills, as well as the principles of mediation. This training was implemented by a private company that provides consultation for schools and communities and helps them set mediation services (Cremin, 2002).

In school number 1, the training was followed up by pupils practicing their skills in real-life situation (Cremin, 2002).

The changes reported in school number 1, were extremely positive, reducing the bullying reports from victims and from witnesses. This might show children beginning to regulate their own behavior (self-regulation). Pupils developed more negative attitudes towards bullying, their empowerment feelings and self-esteem improved. Pupils showed the acquisition of conflict management skills, such as listening to each other, cooperate and communicate and even learn to give and receive positive comments (Cremin, 2002).

Cremin, (2002), reported that as a consequence of putting in practice the training, the school culture improved and there was a general reduction of aggressive behavior (Cremin, 2002).

In school number 2 and 3 the training was not followed by the opportunity to practice in real situations. No changes were noted in pupils' self-esteem and no reduction of bullying events was reported, possibly due to the lack of practice (Cremin, 2002).

Another study was conducted in Cleveland, where some schools implemented an initiative from the Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR). The study was conducted in elementary schools in which

only students from 3th and 5h grade were included; these students were between 8 and 11 years old (Bickmore, 2002).

Participants were trained to mediate conflicts among students, based on five practical steps: (1) Participants give consent to participate in mediation and agree to the confidentiality of the process. (2) Students get to tell their version of the story. (3 and 4) The mediator assists the participants, so they express and listen to each other and understand the problem. The mediator assists them to focusing on the potential solutions and gets them to explore ways to benefit both sides. (5) Parties get to an agreement and commit to it (Bickmore, 2002).

The mediations generally would occur close to the place where the conflict happened and would have to follow the steps of the process (Bickmore, 2002).

Using this practical approach students would still learn about the principles of mediation (Bickmore, 2002).

Due to its practicality, this CCR initiative was widely spread across the USA and other countries. This had high acceptance due to the minimal expenses and adaptations schools have to make in order to implement it. The participation of the pupils is very positive and most importantly, even though just a small group of pupils receive the mediation training, it has proven to be beneficial for the whole school in the sense of understanding and choosing nonviolent conflict resolution and in their confidence to commit and achieve academically (Bickmore, 2002).

In the results of this study, after one year of implementation, we can list several benefits that were identified and they are listed as it follows:

- Familiarity with the process and the purpose of peer mediation increased.
- Over 70% of 3th and 5th graders reported on the follow-up surveys, their interest in becoming mediators. This could suggest how cooperative pupils are towards the training and the mediation process per se, even when the training was provided outside school hours.



-Pupils increased significantly their understanding and their preference for choosing nonviolent conflict resolution, as well as their capacities to handle their own conflicts and interactions with peers.

-Students' attitudes toward attending and participating in school also improved significantly.

-Attending and participating in school were improved.

-There was a considerably increased achievement in the results of the Tests of citizenship and reading, compared with the district average. This could show that CCR's peer mediation program allows the students to concentrate on learning, having their personal problems managed.

-The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders scored considerably stronger grades than 4<sup>th</sup> graders. In this study, 4<sup>th</sup> graders did not have the opportunity to join the program by either teachers or principals believed that such activity would have been detrimental to their Proficiency Test result. In the schools where 4<sup>th</sup> graders were allowed to participate equally as the other students, their grades were equivalent.

-Suspensions and punishments due to violent behavior decreased considerably. More importantly, Cleveland's over-all elementary school's rates of suspension went up 2% whereas in CCR's peer mediation program schools, the rates went 25% down. This result might suggest that teaching pupils conflict management skills and giving them the opportunity to practice it might be more valuable than a reward-punishment approach (Bickmore, 2002).

Despite the benefits listed, this was not enough to improve the perception of the students regarding the school climate. This may be due to the approach of only small groups being trained, instead of integrating the school as a whole and the duration of the program, which was only one year in two specific grades. The study mentions that in those schools where the CCR peer mediation program had full implementation, the perception of the school climate did change positively ( Bickmore, 2002).

Something to be very careful with is the confidentiality of these mediations. This study proved that excessive adult intervention affected mediation negatively. Some of the adult advisors insisted on

being present or involved during the students' mediations; this translates in that the sessions were rarely absolutely confidential (Bickmore, 2002).

This could obey some skepticism from the adults involved as advisors in this program and, therefore the interest in taking place during the sessions.

It is understandable that specific conflicts could present a significant challenge for the student mediating the conflict and further assessment from an adult advisor is required (Bickmore, 2002).

It is hard to draw the line on what is excessive adult intervention and lack of adult intervention. Both extremes detriment the success of the process and the results. On some occasions, constant adult monitoring stifled the interest of the students in participating in this method and in some other cases, mediators could show the need to improve their skills, needing the presence of an adult advisor (Bickmore, 2002).

There were some other circumstances in which mediation did not go well due to mediators unconsciously contradicting the principles of mediation. In these cases, mediators were telling other students how to behave and assigning blame instead of encouraging the parties to explore their own alternatives and choose the best potential agreement for both respecting the principle of self-determination (Bickmore, 2002).

Given the circumstances of peer mediation, it is in the interest of the school staff to provide adequate training, monitor and follow up mediators and participants. Reliable adult support is vital for the implementation of the program (Bickmore, 2002).

While proved being effective, these initiatives also showed that implementing them once is not enough to maintain the culture and climate towards nonviolent conflict resolution. However, there is need of constant reassurance and clarification of the purposes and the principles of mediation (Bickmore, 2002).

Overall this study proved that when sufficient support was provided, the mediators exceeded the expectations (Bickmore, 2002).

Despite of the benefits that these initiatives seem to have according to the studies just reviewed and their encouraging results, the briefness of their assessment, as well as the methodology used, might not be entirely reliable, showing questionable results (Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss , 2007).

With the motivation to find meaningful proof of the effectiveness of peer mediation and based on the reports of the studies that estimated it takes at least two years for the students and five years for the teachers to trust in peer mediation as a legitimate method. Cantrell et al., (2007) decided to initiate a longitudinal based study.

They conducted the study in an elementary school located in the Middle Atlantic region of the United States. The school was in its fifth year after adopting the Peace Pal program (Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss , 2007).

This program was based on the Recommended Standards for School-Based Peer Mediation Programs and part of this program motivations is to combine social learning and cognitive-behavioral theory with the mediation process and taking advantage on the stage of development in which children are in elementary school, with the purpose to help them acquire the skills to self-regulate their behavior from inside-out and manage conflict in a positive and constructive way when it presents in their lives (Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss , 2007).

The goals of the Peace Pal Program are to help on creating an understanding of conflict and anger as well as conflict resolution and peer mediation and to resolve conflicts peacefully through peer mediation (Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss , 2007).

As for the goals of the study following the Peace Pal Program were to measure the knowledge of the students in relation to peer mediation, and discover if the mediations were successful. To find if the suspension rate decreased after the training, if the disputants find the sessions valuable and if the mediators find the program valuable. A pre- and post-training questionnaire was designed for this purpose (Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss , 2007).

The study followed 15 students between 8–11 years old studying their third and fifth grade. Surprisingly for the researchers, the results were no different from the studies conducted in a short period of time but with a broader sample. There was a reduction in the suspension rate. The knowledge regarding mediation increased by 42% post-training. All the mediation sessions were found with satisfactory results according to disputants and mediators, and there was a 100% of satisfaction in mediators and disputants in finding the program valuable (Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss , 2007).

### **1.7 Mediation vs other methods for bullying management**

Mediation is not the only method to manage bullying that has proven to be effective; in fact, the very first program against bullying proved to be very effective. This strategy is the Olweus Bullying Preventing Program (OBPP), it is designed to reduce bullying between students in a school context (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011).

Even when the mediation/peer mediation programs and the OBPP share the intention to manage and prevent bullying among students within a school context, the approaches are very different.

The OBPP is based on adult constant monitoring of students behavior. Adults play the most crucial part in this program since they act as role models that should illustrate how students are expected to behave (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011).

Summarizing the regiments in which the OBPP operates, a list was made as it follows:

- (1) Adults must have a genuine interest in pupils lives and show a friendly attitude towards students.
- (2) Adults should set out the standards of what is unacceptable behavior.
- (3) Adults should use negative, but nonphysical or hostile consequences for the violation of the set of rules.
- (4) Adults should act as positive role models (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011).

Some of the consequences for breaking the rules referred to in this program are to have serious talks with the bullies (usually ipso-facto), referring them to the principal and have close monitoring from

teachers by making them stay close to them at break times and depriving them of privileges (Olweus & Limber, 2010).

There is a committee with the duty to ensure these principles are implemented in schools. The members of this committee include teaching and non-teaching school staff, sometimes members of the community, administrators, parents, counselling and rarely students usually from middle-level education or higher. Members must take the OBPP training provided by certified OBPP trainers and come up with a strategy tailored according to the needs of their school. The strategy must be communicated to the students, school staff and parents (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011).

This committee is provided with monthly consultation from the OBPP trainers through an in-site coordinator. The committee must provide a one-day training for all the school in order to implement the OBPP program (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011).

Schools are asked to adopt four anti-bullying rules, ideally brought up after a school consensus, as a reminder of the expected behavior from students. The staff is encouraged to continually give positive and negative consequences to reinforce these rules (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011).

It is essential to this program to have constant meetings that monitor and remind adults and school staff to the importance of spot bullying behavior as soon as it occurs and act whenever there is suspect it would happen. The victims of bullying receive separate follow up meetings as well as the students who bully, in such meetings, the parents are usually included. The purpose of these meetings is to give the message that the bullying behavior must stop and it will be followed by a closer monitoring from adults in school (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011).

The OBPP includes the launching of a yearly event in which new students are introduced to the school rules regarding bullying and its intention is to increase the awareness bully wise and remind return students as a way to keep up with the program (Olweus & Limber, 2010).

Different from where it originated in Norway, the OBPP program in the USA aims to find community collaboration to expand outside the school, the role models of behavior as well as the adult monitoring (Limber, 2011).

The OBPP has been studied over the years with the purpose of evaluating the program. In its first evaluation in Norway from 1983 to 1985. They followed 2500 students over a period of 2.5 years, in schools where the OBPP program was implemented (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011).

The results of this study found a reduction in self-reports of bullying of a 62% after eight months and 64% after 20 months. Reports of witnesses of bullying diminished 33% after eight months and 53% after 20 months. There was also a positive change in the perception of the school climate (Limber, 2011).

It was also reported that the classes that maintained regular meetings and used role-play as an explorative way to improve the strategy had a greater reduction of bullying (Limber, 2011).

This first results were extremely positive and even showed increased positive results over time. This initiative has had plenty of evaluations in Norway, but one of particular importance is a study that followed students over a period of 5 years, from October 2001 until October 2006. The results showed 40% reduction of self-reports of bully victimization and a 51% reduction of bullying reports (Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011).

Taking into account that there is a considerable reduction in the effectiveness of the programs assessed in the long term, the results of the OBPP demonstrate valuable evidence of persistent positive outcomes (Limber, 2011).

Unfortunately, these results could not be replicated when implementing the OBPP in the USA. The first evaluation of this program in North Carolina showed little response after the first year and after two years of implementation, the OBPP had to conclude. This might obey the lack of fidelity to the program, since adults, school teachers and school staff are the keys for this program to work (Limber, 2011).

The findings in Washington, after three years of evaluation, had a peculiarity in which white students showed decreased physical and relational bullying (37% and 28% respectively) whereas students of other ethnicities did not have the same result (Limber, 2011).

California was one of the few states in which the same study to evaluate the OBPP in Norway (cohort design) was adopted. They evaluated three schools over three years' time. Nevertheless, the findings did not differ much with the other states (Limber, 2011).

Low reduction of self-reports of being bullied decreased 21% in the first year and 14% after two years. Self-reports of bullying others decreased 8% after one year and 17% after the second year. The good news for this school was the increased perception of teachers and students that the bullying policies had been clearly communicated to teachers, school staff, students and parents. Students being bullied showed an increase in telling a teacher about being bullied and had the certainty that there was a general intention from adults to stop the bullying behavior (Limber, 2011).

In Philadelphia, the OBPP was evaluated in six large public schools, the results were enhanced by the previous surveys regarding existing bullying in the schools. With the results of these surveys, the monitoring was emphasized in places where bullying was reported frequently and after a 4-year evaluation, the incidents of bullying diminished its incident density by 45% (Limber, 2011).

The most relevant study in the USA followed a total of 52,000 students and 2,400 teachers within 107 schools in Pennsylvania. A cohort design followed elementary, middle and high schools, 9 of them for three years and the other 98 were examined from 3 to 9 months (Limber, 2011).

Although this study had shown in every research, some positive effects and decreased bullying reports, as well as a more positive perception of the school climate, the reports in the USA, were never as optimistic as they were in Norway. This might obey cultural differences, size and complexity of the schools' population in the different countries as well as the fidelity to the program. There appeared to be dramatic differences regarding the results of the studies between

Norway and outside Norway that question the real effectiveness of the OBPP. These discrepancies might suggest the need for further adaptations to keep the effectiveness of the program in other contexts so it can be successfully replicated (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010; Limber, 2011).

In order to compare the effectiveness of bullying management with other methods different from mediation, a meta-analysis study following anti-bullying initiatives and their effectiveness was reviewed (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

Thanks to this study, they identified that they are some key elements on the programs they reviewed, that were found to be more effective and these elements are: to include parents and school staff in training and meetings, to have playground supervision, to have clear disciplinary methods, to have classroom rules, to provide school conferences and to provide parents with information and cooperative group works (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

They noted that programs inspired by OBPP were very effective, although in older children and specifically in Norway. Programs in which interventions were as frequent as twice per month, also showed high efficacy (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

Eleven year old children or older responded better to the programs than younger children. They found that the effectiveness of the programs increased as children were older. This might be associated with their superior cognitive abilities, which influence their ability to make rational decisions and be less impulsive (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

Over-all the analysis showed that school-based anti-bullying programs are effective (decreasing bullying in 20-23%), being the most effective ones, the ones that included parent involvement, disciplinary methods and playground supervision (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

The disciplinary methods referred to in these reviewed, are the once inspired by OBPP previously mentioned (Olweus & Limber, 2010).

Within this study's revision, the researches assessed an element they called: work with peers, in which they included peer mediation, peer mentoring and bystander intervention. Interestingly the



results in this category were negatively related to an increase in victimization (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

The researchers conclude making a recommendation to those responsible for implement or design anti-bullying policies to take into account the correlations found in this analysis and they openly suggest not to use work with peers (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010). Nevertheless, the lack of specificity to evaluate these three different methods might put in doubt the reliability of their analysis.

## **Chapter 2. Research Methodology and Methods**

### **2.1 Setting aim and objectives**

The aim of this study is to prove mediation could change the negative perception of conflict and teach children to manage conflicts constructively, leaving aside rivalry, enabling positive outcomes as well as its potential use in a school context.

According to the United Nations, education is a human right (United Nations, 1948) and in Ireland, not only is a right but is also an obligation. Children are entitled and obliged to receive free education from 6 to 16 years of age (The Citizens Information Board).

This led to the reflection of the need to support in a practical way the learning of social skills by adopting mediation to manage conflicts, bullying included.

Considering that in Ireland, as referred in the literature review, 22.4% of students in primary schools and 11.8% in post-primary reported being victims of bullying., the first draft of this study was elaborated: Mediation as an anti-bullying policy in Irish schools.

Reflecting on this first draft, based on the recommendation of Saunders et al. (2015), personal believes and experiences were spotted between the lines of the title of this potential study. Three assumptions were discovered within this title. The first one being: mediation is effective and therefore, it should become an anti-bullying policy for schools. The second assumption was regarding the type of conflicts mediation could mediate, affirming that bullying is suitable to mediate bullying conflicts and consequently should be adopted as an anti-bullying policy.

The third assumption was that bullying was a problem that Irish schools were facing.

Reflecting on these assumptions, a paradox was also found in the study. The compelling manner in which the title was drafted, suggested mediation as the only method within this anti-bullying policy, not allowing children to choose from another methods a part form mediation, contradicting the principle of voluntariness of mediation and compromising the learnings from the process.

With the aim of addressing the bias just discussed and taking into account that since the year 2013 is compulsory for the schools to have an anti-bullying policy and monitor bullying in accordance with the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools. The study took the approach of becoming part of this already implemented policy as one of the options to manage bullying. Mediation as a tool to deal with bullying in schools

The study took one more turn while reviewing literature and finding not only mediation in schools had supporters but also active detractors (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010) in consequence, the study took the shape of a question, the research question. Could mediation be used to manage bullying in schools in Ireland?

## **2.2 Target population**

Based on the ideas of Sanchez Garcia-Arista (2018) and in the cognitive theory that Craig & Don, (2009) discussed, both referred to in the literature review. Primary schools were chosen as the target population. Primary education covers the period of the middle-childhood. A period in which essential concepts for social skills and adulthood are developed, such as fairness a justice and the concepts of right and wrong (Craig & Don, 2009).

Ireland has a particular sector of schools called DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools). These schools are disadvantaged schools. According to the Education Act 1998 referred in the Report On The Review of DEIS (2017) disadvantage schools are the ones that due to a social or economic disadvantage, students are prevented from having an adequate benefit from education (Department of Education and Skills, 2017).

These schools, identified as DEIS schools, were targeted after conducting a national assessment, in which the purpose was to evaluate the schools in terms of socio-economic backgrounds. Having identified the disadvantaged schools based on the principles that education is:

1. Critical to promote social inclusion as well as economic development
2. Every child and young person has the right to access education and

3. Every child has the right to achieve their full educational potential to benefit in a personal, social and economical way (Department of Education and Skills, 2017), a plan was put in action to fight the effect this disadvantages could have on their students.

Having considered the information regarding disadvantaged schools and taking in consideration that bullying could obey an imbalance of power and this could refer, according to Corcoran & McGuckin (2014), to either a social status as well as technology access, the following assumption was drawn: due to their socio-economic disadvantages, students from DEIS schools might be more vulnerable to suffer from bullying and therefore could have more benefit from learning mediation. This became the motivation to choose DEIS primary schools as the target population.

At this point, the research question, aim and objectives took their final form.

### **Could Mediation be used to manage bullying in DEIS Irish primary schools?**

#### **2.3 Aim**

To critically analyse if mediation could be used to manage bullying within Irish DEIS primary schools

#### **2.4 Objectives**

1. To analyse the mediation process and its potential use to manage bullying within a primary school context.
2. To find out the current situation of DEIS primary schools in Ireland regarding bullying management and their knowledge regarding mediation.
3. To outline how mediation could be used to manage and prevent bullying in DEIS primary schools in Ireland.

## **2.5 Philosophy**

At first, interpretivism seemed the philosophy representing this study; this philosophy supports that social phenomena cannot be studied the same way than social science is studied and since elements of this research were associated with being a social phenomenon, this conclusion was made.

Studying a social phenomenon such as bullying, or a social experience like mediation, implies that the subjects to the study are the individuals subject to bullying or mediation. According to interpretivism, individuals are seen as social actors who have different backgrounds, different ways of thinking and different cultural beliefs. When these individuals bring all their differences and share an experience, in this case, bullying or mediation, the interpretations of the experience would be vast and different meanings would emerge from the same experience. This philosophy would not try to generalize these findings but would encourage them and find value in that they create a richer and more in-depth understanding of the experience (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, pp. 136-140).

However, while gathering information for the first phase of the study. The realization that there was more than enough material to understand both bullying and mediation and there was no need to create richer understanding in these areas, but there was a need to prove the compatibility of these two elements and their potential benefit. In consequence, this philosophy was dismissed.

Reflecting on the objectives, Pragmatism philosophy was found to be more suitable for this study. This philosophy values practical knowledge that could be found in either theory or experiences or a combination of these elements and considers both objective and subjective discoveries in order to translate them into practical knowledge that could be applied and replicate in specific contexts (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, pp. 139-140).

In this case, bullying and mediation play the part of the subjective experiences from which the aim is to find practical elements to outline how mediation could be used to manage bullying in a specific context, as it is DEIS Irish Primary Schools.

Bullying could be perceived differently since it is a personal experience. There is not an absolute definition of what it is, making it a subjective element and yet there is an effort in trying to measure aspects of it and figuring elements to understand it and, in this way, stop it effectively.

For pragmatism, there is enormous value in finding applicable elements and in this study, the aim is to find elements of mediation that could benefit students suffering from bullying and fight bullying effectively. Facilitating the development of strategies to use mediation to manage bullying, applying practical elements that are proved to work and that can be replicated in a specific context like schools.

Mediation is also subjective for the participants of mediation and therefore the need to find elements in the process that could enhance mediation potential and that could be used and replicated in each mediation process so the participants could have a more predictable experience during mediation and facilitate effectiveness (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, pp. 142-143).

## **2.6 Approach to theory development**

To cover the objectives, two different sources of data would be analysed, secondary data for the first objective and primary data for the second objective, these led to consider abduction as the approach. According to Saunders, et al. (2015), this approach is a combination of the deductive and inductive approach (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, pp. 148-150) . The first thought was to use deduction for the secondary data and induction for the primary data.

A deductive approach tries to find a relation between concepts; this would allow in a way to understand how mediation and the concept of bullying could be related. (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, pp. 144-147). Nevertheless, this correlation would not bring enough clarity to the question this study aims to answer, and most importantly, this study does not propose a theory to put to tests as the deductive approach would require to, as a result, the deductive approach was dismissed.

Based on the way the objectives one and two would have to be covered, having to analyse

information, either from literature or collected directly and draw conclusions out of the findings, led to the conclusion that an inductive approach would be the one to use (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, p. 147).

To cover the third objective of this study, having to analyse the findings from the objectives one and two, to be able to outline how mediation could be used to manage bullying in primary schools, taking an inductive approach was also necessary (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, p. 147).

## **2.7 Methodological choice**

Considering that to answer the objectives, two different types of data would have to be collected in separated stages, the need to use mixed methods that would allow combining different types of data led to choose a multi-phase design. (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, p. 170)

This study would be conducted in two phases. The first phase secondary qualitative data would be collected and analysed. For the second phase primary quantitative data would be collected and analysed, for this reason, the methodological choice was a sequential exploratory research design. This method is compatible with the inductive approach previously selected and the pragmatism view (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, pp. 169-171).

A Partially Integrated Mixed Method was considered but dismissed since this design involves more than two phases of data collection or analysis (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, p. 172).

## **2.8 Strategy**

Since one of the objectives was to know the current situation regarding bullying and the knowledge regarding mediation that Irish DEIS primary schools have, the instrument considered was to develop a self- completed questionnaire (survey) that the school's principals could answer one time in a concise manner. By using a multiple-choice answer, the time demand would be shortened, promoting the engaging in the survey and encouraging participation. The most practical, money and time-saving manner to deliver this survey and obtaining the answers back in a prompt manner was to conduct this survey online. An online survey using closed questions would minimize the

efforts that respondents could encounter, facilitating the participation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, pp. 440-452).

After the review and approval of the design of these questions by the supervisor of this study, the survey consisted of eleven investigative multiple questions, in which only one of the questions could have the possibility of an open answer.

The aim of the first two questions was to find out if the principle was familiarized with mediation and the level of understanding of mediation, by having to choose between three different definitions of mediation.

Questions 3 and 4 were made to find out if schools actually have an anti-bullying policy, even when they are required to have one, as well as the frequency in which it has been used during the current scholar year.

Questions 5 required them to appoint how effective they perceive their anti-bullying policy is.

The aim of questions 6, 7 and 8, was to know if they were already using mediation/peer mediation, if they have considered this method and if they would be willing to try it.

The question number 9 is the only one that has the possibility of an open answer as well as to choose from the options given, and it was designed to explore what situations they could encounter against this method if they were to use it.

The last two questions (10 and 11) were included as a practical way to compare the data collected and findings related to the particularities of the schools since the schools included were urban and rural, and their population was either mixed, girls only or boys only. Therefore question 10 asked the type of school they were and question 11 the population of their school.

The platform used for the purpose of delivering this online survey and get the answers back in a practical and secure manner, was Google Forms.

An introductory email was sent to the 95 newest DEIS Primary Schools. The document was addressed personally to the principal of each school and contained an introductory note of myself,



the purpose of the study, the importance of their engagement on it, as well as an explanation of the ethical considerations of their participation and a hyperlink to access the survey (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, pp. 468-470).

## **2.9 Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations that found to be relevant for this study and included in the introductory e-mail were in regard to participation and withdrawal. It was explained to the respondents that participation in this study was voluntary and participants have the right to withdraw from it at any time without the need for an explanation (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, p. 244).

As well as regarding confidentiality/ anonymity, in which it is mentioned that the data collected in this study is entirely anonymous and will only be used for statistical purposes and that there was no personal information is collected in this survey (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, p. 244).

## **2.10 Sampling**

In order to select the sample, the first consideration was to conduct a probability sampling, however, this could not be possible due to the complications on finding a reliable source to set the sample frame due to the lack of an existent public record that gathered all DEIS primary schools in Ireland.

It is acknowledged that a probability sampling would have been ideal for the purposes of this study and that under different circumstances, it might have been possible to obtain from the Department of Education and Skills the record of the DEIS primary schools to set as my sample frame. The measurements for the preventions of the spreading of the Covid-19 pandemic that took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, lead to the closure of the schools and the posterior lockdown of the country. Therefore these institutions were not reachable for not essential purposes at the time (Department of Education and Skills , 2020) and this led to change the sample.

The purposive sampling was then considered. The sampling population would be the newest DEIS Primary Schools, meaning these DEIS Primary Schools, were the last schools that were included in

2017, according to the document found in the Department of Education and Skills website (Department of Education and Skills).

According to Saunders et al. (2015), this type of sampling could compromise the objectivity of the results and not having meaningful statistical findings (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, p. 295).

Nevertheless, it could illustrate the situation of a sector of DEIS Primary Schools since now the sampling would cover the total of the target population, considering it is a relatively short sample of 95 schools. The findings of this data could be later used in a following study to set a parameter and compare against the DEIS Primary Schools that were adopted when the initiative started.

### **Chapter 3. Presentation of the Data**

The qualitative data of this study provided more meaningful information than quantitative data. The qualitative data were analysed using a thematic analysis based on Braun & Clarke, (2006), that included 19 academic articles related to bullying in schools, bullying management in schools and mediation in schools, published between 2000 and 2020, with the exception of two articles published in 1996, included due to their relevance. The platforms considered were EBSCO Databases, SAGE and Scholar Google.

For the second objective, the instrument of a self-complete online survey with 11 closed questions, previously described in this text, was sent to the newest 95 DEIS Irish Primary Schools, through an email with a hyperlink to open the survey in the Google Forms platform. The email was addressed to the principal of each school on the 17 of April 2020. Eight responses were received after sending this email.

A follow-up email was sent a week later, thanking the early participants and reminding the invitation to participate in the survey to the non-respondents. The hyperlink to the survey was included. One response was received after this follow-up.

Due to the low response of engagement, a third follow up email was sent two weeks after the original email, thanking the participants again and doing a final invitation for the non-respondents. The hyperlink to the survey was included (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015, p. 478).

One more response was received after the last follow up, summing ten respondents total.

### 3.1 Charts

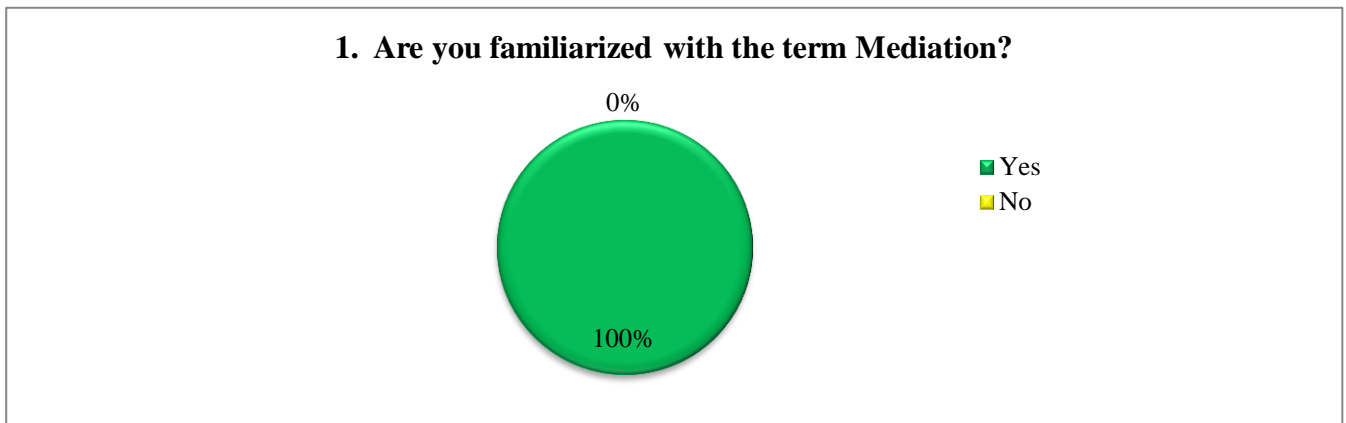


Figure 1

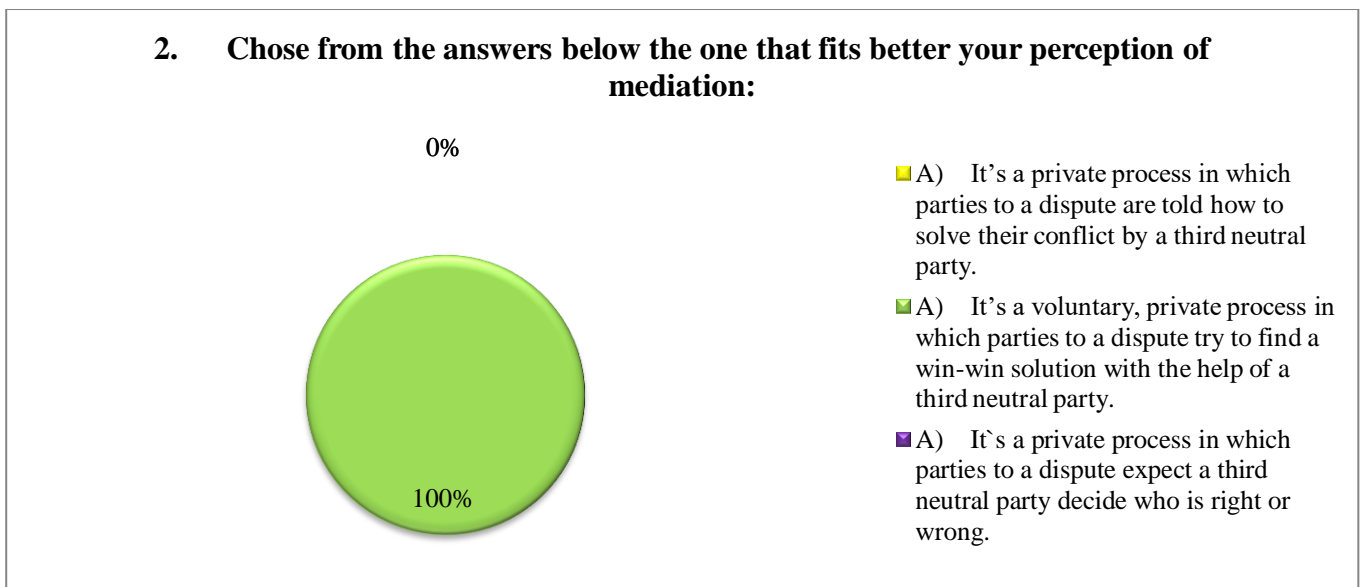


Figure 2

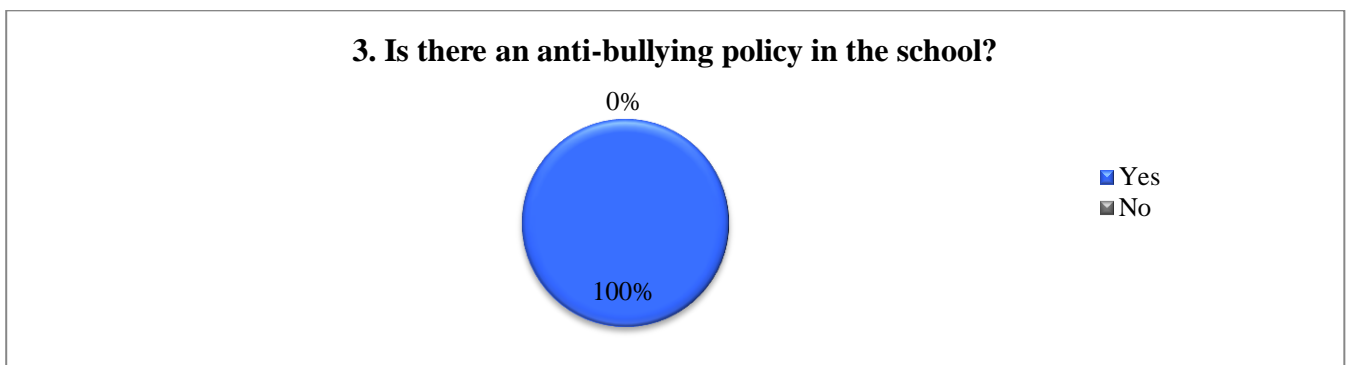


Figure 3

4. If there is, how many times in this scholar year, had you have to use it?



Figure 4

5. How effective would you consider your anti-bullying policy is?

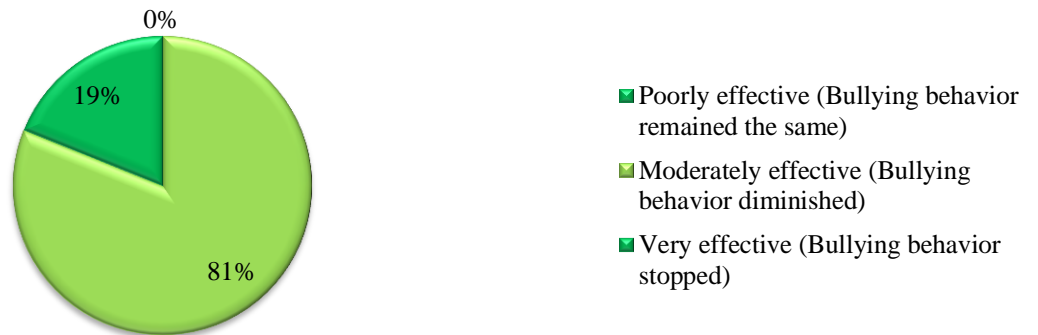


Figure 5

6. Is your school using mediation/peer mediation for conflict management?

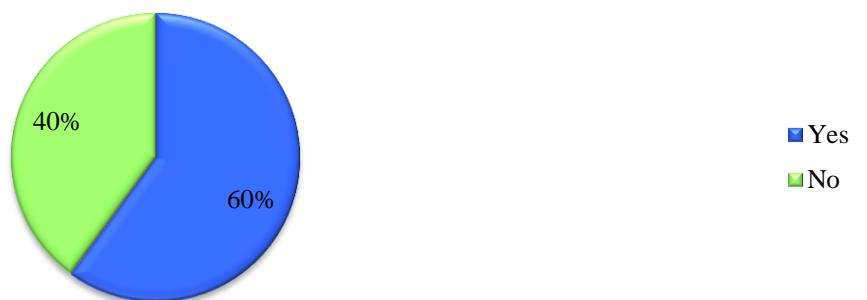
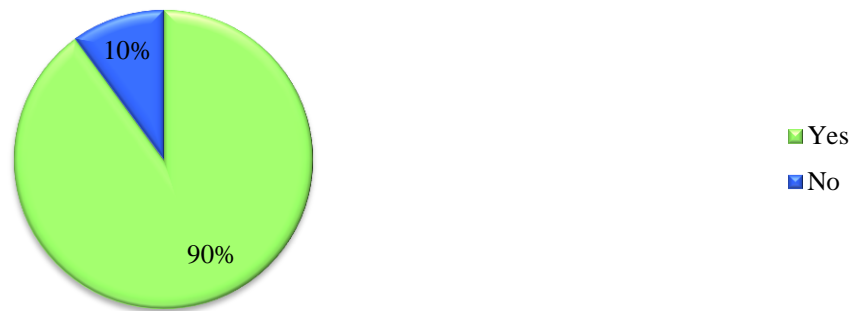


Figure 6

**7. Have you considered mediation to manage bullying in your school?**



**Figure 7**

**8. Proven its effective, would you consider implementing mediation to manage bullying in your school?**



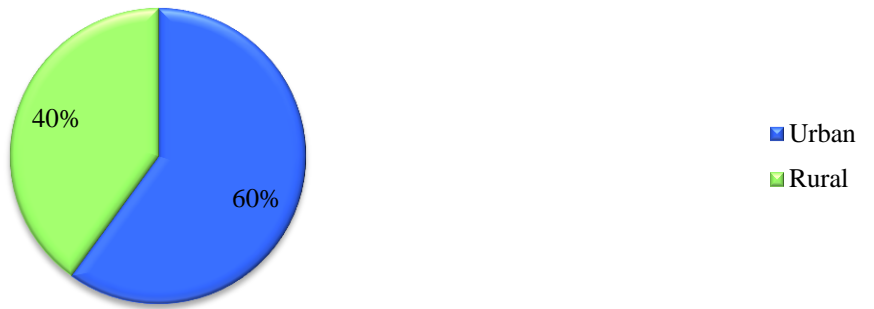
**Figure 8**

**9. If you were to adopt mediation in your school, what would you think would be the main issue you would encounter?**



**Figure 9**

**10. Is your school rural or urban?**



**Figure 10**

**11. The population of your school is:**



**Figure 11**

## **Chapter 4. Data Analysis and Findings**

### **4.1 Phase 1. Qualitative data**

After two stages of categorizing and correlating information of the 19 articles based on the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), one article was dismissed due to their lack of correlation with the other articles and their focus not being within a school context (Bozin, Doris; Ballard, Allison; Easteal, Patricia;, 2019). The 18 articles left were correlated and brought in to four themes, from which a report was made as it follows:

#### **-Bullying definition and consequences:**

A. Volk offered a practical review of bullying definitions through the years, being the Olweus definition the most used and referred in terms of bullying, by saying that bullying is a negative action that can be interpreted as to inflict injury, discomfort by physical contact, words, making faces, mean gestures or intentional exclusion from a group, expressed towards one or more students, repeatedly over time. (A. Volk, V. Dane, & Zopito A., 2014; Olweus D. A., 2010).

Ttofi & Farrington (2010) added to this interpretation of negative actions, the name-calling, having rumors spread about you and intention to cause fear or distress.

It is the opinion of the author in accordance with Corcoran & Mc Guckin, (2014) to support that cyberbullying should be treated as bullying even when the events happen only once in the cyberspace, since the shameful/harmful material against another person, could be seen and replicated for many others.

Foody et al. (2018), reported that, in Ireland, 22.4% of students in primary schools and 11.8% in post-primary schools referred to be victims of bullying in 2017.

Hinduja & Patchin, (2010), found that victims and offenders have increased suicidal thoughts in comparison with students that have not being exposed to such experiences, including cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). The OBPP program itself was born after three students taking their own



lives presumably after suffering from severe bullying from their peers. Therefore, bullying behavior should be taken seriously and should be managed accurately in order to prevent such events from repeating.

### **-Mediation and their psychological benefits**

Lawrence and Sanchez supported and talked explicitly regarding the psychological benefits of the mediation process. The actions mediation requires the participants to do while the process of mediation, like speaking out loud about issues around to the disputes and venting strong emotions, allows empathy for each other's grievances enabling the possibility of an apology, allows building empathy, to practice self-reflection and self-regulation as well as the self-determination inner to the process of mediation. Not only facilitating the acquisition and practice of social and negotiation skills but improving the climate and the likelihood of a good agreement between them (Lawrence, 1996; Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018).

As from Bultena et al. (2015) even though she does not focus on the psychological benefits of mediations, supports that is a proactive solving problem method and helps the participants look forward to the conflict, being confidential, flexible and under their own terms.

### **-Pro Mediation to manage bullying in primary schools**

Johnson & Johnson, (1996), Bickmore, (2002), Cremin, (2002), Cantrell et al. (2007) share the positive results using mediation to manage bullying, using another previously trained student playing the role of a mediator. The results they share are academic achievement, suspension rate associated with bullying diminished and violence reduction. Johnson & Johnson, (2001) also reported 100 % of satisfaction by the participants that used mediation and reported the achievement of an agreement in all of the mediations.

In Cremin, (2002), there is also violence reduction, self-esteem and empowerment feelings improved, as well as social skills like cooperation and listening to each other.

Johnson & Johnson, (2001) and Bickmore, (2002), reported development or improvement of the

self-regulation skill, supporting the theory of Sanchez, (2018) regarding mediation process sharpening this particular social skill.

### **-Pro OBPP programs**

The OBPP reported being very successful in Norway, place it was originated (Olweus & Limber, 2010). When implemented in the USA the success rate plummeted, possibly due to lack of engagement of the implementers or cultural differences (Limber, 2011). Regardless, it inspired programs to adapt most of their principles in order to achieve effectiveness (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

OBPP requires schools to have a committee in charge of including the school as a whole in this program, as well as disciplinary methods, such as severe talks with the students engaging in bullying behavior and a yearly event to communicate the anti-bullying policies to new students (Olweus D. A., 2010)

Ttofi & Farrington (2010) reported from their meta-analysis regarding school-based anti-bullying programs effectiveness, the key elements related to the effectiveness of programs managing bullying in schools, these elements were frequency on intervention (at least meetings twice per month), broad approaches, such as including parents and community members to the anti-bullying programs, playground supervision and the disciplinary methods of the OBPP. They reported a negative effect using working with peer programs, such as peer mediation, peer mentoring and bystander intervention. Despite the rigorous analysis of Ttofi & Farrington, (2010), the inclusion of peer mediation, peer mentoring and bystander intervention in the same category to be evaluated it does not reflect the advantages or disadvantages of each of these methods and it might be an indicator of the failure of fair evaluation since peer mediation has several positive reports supporting their effectiveness.

Further assess might be required to address which one of these three methods sharing the

communality to work with peers is the one causing negative effects, contrasting the positive reports that peer mediation has gotten in other studies.

An outline of a school-based method to use in DEIS Primary Schools, integrating the advantages of mediation among with the elements related to effectiveness found in this text, can be found in the discussion.

## **4.2 Phase 2. Quantitative data**

### **4.2.1 Survey responses:**

The total of the responses received were 10 of a total of 95 schools surveyed.

For questions one and two: the 10 respondents answered they were familiarized with the term mediation and got the definition of mediation right.

For question three: the 10 schools answered they do count with an anti-bullying policy in their school.

For question four: 7 responders used the anti-bullying policy from 1 to 5 five times in this school year, 1 responder used it 10 to 20 times, and 2 responded they did not use it at all during this scholar year.

For question five: 6 responders considered their anti-bullying policy moderately effective (the bullying behavior diminished) and 4 responders consider their anti-bullying policy very effective (the bullying behavior stopped). Which might suggest a discrepancy with the repetition of bullying found in question four.

For question six: 6 schools were using mediation/peer mediation for conflict management in their schools and 4 schools answered they were not. This answer was not expected, since there are no studies that had evaluated mediation in schools in Ireland, however, there is a need to know in-depth how these mediations are being conducted.

For questions seven and eight: Only one responder answered have not considered adopting

mediation, and 9 responders say they had. All of them answered that if proved to be effective, would adopt mediation. Which shows an encouraging picture for the implementation of this method.

For question nine: If you were to adopt mediation, what would you think it would be the main issue you would encounter? 5 responders choose a lack of resources (time, money, infrastructure), 3 responders choose parents resistance, 1 responder choose teachers resistance and one responder added: 'we adopt it already', suggesting this question might need more explicit structure. Furthermore, the lack of resources might indicate that for DEIS Schools, the training for implementing mediation as well as for conducted would have to be tailor specifically for each school in order to minimize the need of extra resources.

For question ten and eleven: 6 schools were rural and 4 urban, 9 schools were mixed and 1 was a boys school. This answers might show a slightly stronger engagement in the interest of competence improvement of the urban schools, against rural, as for the population of the schools, the majority of the target population were mixed schools, which shows no surprise reflecting of this answer.

Unfortunately, the low rate of response for the quantitative phase of this study does not allow to make meaningful conclusions.

The rate of respondents was 10.5%, meaning only ten schools out of 95 answered the online survey. While the closures of the schools and lockdown of the country due to the efforts of fighting the current Covid-19 pandemic, might have had a great influence on the low rate response (10.5%), in 2011 Corcoran & Mc Guckin, faced a similar situation by getting a low rate of response (12%) when addressing an online questionnaire regarding bullying managements to post-primary schools principles in Ireland (Corcoran & Mc Guckin, 2014), this might suggest the use of another approach may be more appropriate for this specific sector. It is in the authors believes that considering another approach that demands more from the respondent, such as a postal survey, would have even lower rates. As for interviews, either telephonic or face to face, the breach of anonymity might

result in bias (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2015). Taking into account this information, it might represent a big challenge for future researchers to reach this particular sector.

## **Chapter 5. Discussion**

### **5.1 Mediation already been used in DEIS Primary Schools?**

Even though the low rate of responses gathered from the survey, does not allow to make meaningful conclusions, there were six principals that answered they were already implementing mediation. However, as they were no references found in the platforms used, nor in the Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools (Department of Education and Skills , 2020) regarding mediation being used Irish Schools, this survey was necessary to explore if this method was known and used in the first place.

Having these six schools claiming the use of mediation suggest further investigation to know how these mediations are being carried on, since it could be easily mistaken for the times' teachers manage a conflict between their students without necessarily meeting the principles of mediation.

### **5.2 Role of Schools**

The author believes that in the discussion regarding bullying the role of schools must be defined. As Craig and Don, (2019), state, schools play a critical role in childhood development and schools should focus on how to use this as an advantage to prepare self-sufficient youngsters with the eager of continuing their education and as a natural consequence of their formation they grow into healthy, self-sufficient adults that could play a role model for the generations to come.

In Ireland from 1999 primary schools adopted in their curriculum a section called The Social Personal and Health Education Curriculum (SPHE), this class has the purpose of introducing the senses of well-being and confidence, as well as to promote self-responsibility and understanding of their feelings and manage their own behavior in order to integrate them into the society and make them proactive and responsible citizens (Citizens Information Board).

The author believes that to add this in the curriculum has excellent value and that this initiative, shares the goals and principles of mediation. As reviewed earlier in this document, the psychological benefits of mediation and the learnings the participants could have from it, such as

self-reflection, self-regulation, self-determination, are the skills that classes like the SPHE theorize about and that mediation puts in practice. The aim of preparing children to become model citizens as a result of including these materials in the curriculum should be supported and put in practice to reinforce its value.

As discussed from the study conducted by Cremin,(2002), theorizing without practice, made no difference in the results of the study. The schools that received the training to implement a mediation program in their schools that did not follow the training with practicing the new learnings in real-life situations did not show any changes regarding bullying cases reduction, contrary to the school that did implement the program in a practical way.

This could be the scenario that primary schools could encounter by adopting a theory approach only and not putting this theory in practice. Therefore reinforcing this knowledge with a practical approach could have a long-lasting effect on pupils' lives, reaching the goal that Irish primary schools promote, educating proactive and responsible citizens.

The author agrees with Ttofi & Farrington, (2010) when they state that to implement or create new programs to fight bullying, it is fundamental to consider the strategies and elements that have proved to be effective.

Nevertheless, the author disagrees on their suggestion to discard completely programs like peer mediation, based on the results of a group generalization which includes peer mentoring and bystander intervention.

While the results of their meta-analytic study proved to have negative results regarding working with peers (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010), the lack of specificity to evaluate peer mediation within a general categorization, questions the reliability of the results.

The purpose of schools should be to educate our children and provide them with the knowledge and skills to become healthy, self-sufficient adults. This is an approach that Irish schools have taken, to the point to add in their curriculum a class with this purpose.

Considering this purpose, it might put in doubt the long term benefits of having control and monitor-based programs, like the OBPP, that block the opportunity for peers to learn from conflict and to start practicing to regulate their own behavior without a system of punishment-reward in which there is no genuine learning on how can students manage their own interactions with others and missing out the potential learnings that conflict brings, such as opportunities to discover and practice communication skills, empathy, collaboration, problem-solving skills, integrative negotiation, all of it inside a frame of self-determination.

All those learning opportunities could be potentially stifled by a system that might be bringing great results based on diverting children's interest from solving their conflicts, to avoid negative and shameful consequences (like having to stay close to the teacher during break times to the eyes of everyone) (Limber, 2011), that most likely lead to resentful feelings that might in the future escalate the existing conflicts, rather than obeying a genuine interest to resolve them, as a consequence of the empathy that communication offers in dynamics like mediation.

Is in the view of the author that education should look at conflicts as a natural and inner consequence of interacting with others and should pursue to end the negative stigmas that prevent pupils from learning from them by trying at all costs to avoid them or punish them. Mediation sees opportunities in conflict by just changing the strategy to deal with it. Trying to maintain the relationships of the subjects to conflict and making them move forward of the problem by working together to potentiate the possible solutions, so they can both have some benefit from it.

Programs like OBPP might have been necessary at the time, due to the tragic events behind its invention (three students committed suicide most likely as a result of suffering severe bullying from their peers) (Olweus & Limber, 2010). It has to be recognised all the awareness regarding bullying prevention and management that this program brought to the education system around the world for more than two decades (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010; Limber, 2011). Furthermore, it is precisely that thanks to these initiatives, education is now ready to give a step forward and pass from adult



monitor and controlling strategies to students able to regulate their own behavior, students who trust their communication and conflict management skills enough not to rely on violence or power control to resolve their conflicts.

Another consideration that is not mentioned in the studies regarding the OBPP related strategies is the mental health and stress put into the shoulders of those who the program relays on. Since the results of these initiatives have proved to depend entirely on the staff who monitors the students, as well as the role models. These activities require more time from staff and could be physically and mentally exhausting, not counting the possible blame or the potential consequences that could take place in case that some bullying event occurs under their watch. This brings an advantage of mediation over the OBPP or OBPP based programs, in which the aim is to promote self-regulation skills.

### **5.3 Confidentiality using mediation in schools**

As we explored in this document, confidentiality is one of the principles in which mediation works. Taking into account that mediation is one method of Alternative Dispute Resolutions and that the purpose of ADR is to offer a more expeditious, private, potentially less expensive alternative to court to resolve a dispute, we need to understand that under these circumstances confidentiality is essential.

Due to the advantages explored earlier in this document, mediation has been extrapolated to an educational context to resolve children's disputes. Therefore confidentiality should be taken carefully. Although the author agrees and supports that confidentiality is key to the process, since it could help to vent strong emotions and feelings (Lawrence, 1996; Sanchez Garcia-Arista, 2018), there are more aspects to it when mediation is used to manage bullying.

### **5.4 Exceptions to confidentiality**

Mostly the form that mediations adopts when using it in a school context is peer mediation, it has to be taken into consideration that there will be certain disputes that will overcome the skills of the student acting as a third neutral party, consequently, the author agrees with Bickmore, (2002) supporting that the supervision of a trained adult is essential.

In his study Bickmore, (2002) also proved that excessive adult intervention could potentially block the disclosure and communication during mediations and this could cause reluctance from students to engage in peer mediations.

He also proved that the opposite extreme to that is also not contributing to the process. The lack of adult supervision could lead students' mediators to misinterpret their role as a neutral party and start to bring blame and tell other students how to act and behave (Bickmore, 2002).

There is not a clear line that could guide us to establish how much is too much adult intervention and when there is a lack of it. Adult supervision is essential when using mediation in a school context and as long as a good understanding of the aims of implementing mediation in schools as well as an exceptional understanding of the process could provide enough criteria for the adults participating in it.

Something the researchers reviewed did not mention is that the disclosure of information during this type of mediation could be critical help to spot and evaluate the potential need for psychological support for the participants. Mediations could help underlying more conflicts or actors involved relevant to the detriment of the participant's well-being and therefore, an adult with sufficient training should be present, with the purpose to spot this type of sensible information and provide adequate assistance, most likely referring children for professional help, without exposing or violating students' rights, as well as looking after the mental well-being of student serving as a mediator.

The importance of providing rigorous training previous to the implementation of these mediations is vital to prevent adults that, in their aim to help and intervene in children's conflicts, hinder the process.

Adult supervision should have the criteria to intervene only in extreme cases, either when the student who is serving as a mediator stops being neutral or when aggressions or violence take place in the heat of the communication process. Adult supervision should give enough place for children to explore and learn from the up and downs of communication and not cut the process and impose their criteria, the self-determination of the process should be respected at all times unless it attempts with the well-being of the participants.

When sensible information that could indicate trauma or abuse of the participants, confidentiality should be lifted and the adult supervising the mediation should report and consult with the persons relevant to the case (social workers or psychologist, parents) before interfering potentially hindering the solution or causing more harm. This should also be communicated to the participants, helping them trust in the process by not feeling deceived when intervention occurs.

If the mediation is not held by another student, the mediator should also spot and report the type of information we just discussed.

In the end, the aim of having mediations in schools is to help children to resolve their disputes in order for them to stop, and if this mediation helps underlying more conflicts or actors involved relevant to the detriment of their well-being, this information needs to be use and managed wisely, keeping in mind at all times, that their well-being is the most important thing.

### **5.5 Neutrality using mediation in schools**

The role of the mediator playing a neutral part is something that should be managed adequately. Since the mediations conducted by another student or a teacher could easily attempt against this principle, even though peer mediation could even be more beneficial for schools than mediation without this modality. This is because of the learning that students can have by acting as a neutral

party (Bickmore, 2002). The process of acting as a neutral party requires to reflect on the questions to ask to make parties communicate, requires to maintain away from favoritisms and taking sides, and requires them to practice self-regulation in order not to give their own opinion, respecting the parties determinations (The Association for Conflict Resolution , 2014).

Despite the advantages it might have, it could be counterproductive if managed poorly. If the student mediating a conflict happens to be a friend or a classmate of one of the parties, the mediation process is compromised and should not be conducted. This could be a problem, especially for small schools in which children know and interact with all the students of the school. In these cases, mediation should not adopt the peer mediation approach.

Neutrality could also be a problem when the mediators are the teachers since their role could be easily mistaken when mediating a process with their own students. Teachers should not be put in this situation because it could be easy to confuse information disclosure during mediation that should remain confidential, with information disclosure during class, and this could compromise the trust of the students in the process of mediation.

Another aspect to keep in mind is that children might behave differently in the presence of their teacher being a mediator, hobbling the trust to disclosure. Fears such as the teacher changing their opinion about them or fear of future retaliation against them might arise, compromising the process in consequence.

It is in the authors believes this principle should be respected at all times and managed adequately in order not to be an impediment to put in place the mediations. Simple actions such as designate students to serve as mediators from other classes other than their own as well as training non-teaching staff from school with the purpose of mediation could be practical considerations to respect the principles of mediation and allow the process to work.

Considering what has been discussed regarding the confidentiality in relation to this type of mediation (mediation in school), it is imperative not to forget about the adult supervising the

mediations. This adult should meet the principle of being neutral for the participants, even when his participation remains passive.

### **5.6 Considerations and the outlining of an integrative strategy**

After going through the aspects of how mediation has been working in schools that adopted this method, as well as how schools manage bullying using other methods. The author proposes the creation of a combined strategy that could boost the advantages of these different approaches reviewed in this text.

The elements that Ttofi & Farrington, (2010), found to be related to effectiveness does not contradict with the principles of mediation and could be integrated to work synergistically and provide the best strategy to fight bullying and introduce students to the learning and the advantages of conflict management.

For this purpose, the author considers the mediation training strategy of Johnson & Johnson used in the peacemakers' program as the core of the new integrative strategy. The peacemaker program not only proved to be very effective, but offers a clear, practical guide of how to implement it.

It would be implemented using a broad approach, including parents and members of the community as well as the school as a whole, to receive the training, since broad approach proved to be one of the elements that boost efficacy (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

To boost this strategy, and in accordance with Olweus, (2010), an internal board would be created and

this board could revise and evaluate continually the implementations of this initiative and covers possible gaps or problems that could occur when using this method.

As Ttofi & Farrington, (2010) suggested, the frequency in which this board would have to operate would be holding meetings twice per month. These meetings could be used to tailor and meet the needs of a particular issue arousing or to clarify the school's anti-bullying policy, as well as constant training regarding mediation and integrative negotiation (Olweus D. A., 2010).

The element of playground supervision could be covered by enabling the service of mediation or peer mediation in the playground and during breaks (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

The decision of children engaging in mediation or not, should be respected at all times, however, bullying behavior must not be tolerated.

Having outlined a strategy integrating mediation with the essential elements proved to be related with effectiveness, provides enough guidance for DEIS Primary Schools on how to implement mediation to manage bullying conflicts in a broad approach, yet allowing them to tailor and add their own elements to cover their particular needs.

Further studies will need to be conducted to follow the results of using this integrative mediation approach.

## **Conclusions**

This study was necessary due to the lack of references of mediation being used in school contexts in Ireland. Despite the low rate response of the quantitative data that did not allow to find meaningful results, this study confirmed the need for further research regarding the use of mediation in Irish primary schools, DEIS schools included.

From the qualitative data, mediation for managing bullying in primary schools reported to have multiple benefits, including the development of social skills like self-regulation and diminished the bullying behavior, answering the question formulated in this study (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; 2001; Bickmore, 2002; Cremin, 2002; Cantrell, Parks-Savage, & Rehfuss, 2007) Programs to manage bullying different from mediation (OBPP) also proved to be effective, but there is no report of the development of such social skills (Olweus D. A., 2010; Olweus & Limber, 2010; Limber, 2011; Ttofi & Farrington, 2010).

The report from Ttofi & Farrington, (2010) suggested a negative effect of working with peers, including in this category peer mediation, peer mentoring and bystander intervention. Their general approach does not show a fair technique to evaluate peer mediation neither the other two methods.

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored. Therefore if implementing peer mediation to manage bullying in DEIS primary schools should be followed carefully, considering the outlining provided in this text.

### **Reflection**

By conducting this study I had the opportunity to learn and shape my reflection skills since to be able to design and choose a methodology and show coherence through the whole process, requires constant attention, requires to go back and forth through the literature and your writing, to question and filter sources and statements, to compare and contrast approaches and to select the adequate data from a sea of information, in which is easy to get lost.

Being a researcher is almost like being a mediator, one has to detach from the outcome and focus on the process, in the end, the outcome is not personal and there is no right or wrong, is the way things ran their course and as a mediator does, the researcher has to look after the process and focus on it.

The most challenging part of having to conduct a study was to find coherence and match with the methodology the process I had in mind to collect data and analyse it. Having to justify every step made me reflect on the assumptions and possible mistakes I could make.

Nevertheless, it is easy to state the process was the most challenging part, only by looking in retrospective. As I was making progress and I was gathering experience reflecting and reshaping ideas and understanding approaches, I was also gaining experience and confidence to give the next step until it became a loop of reward and learning. This process begins only when there is something to work on, but selecting a subject to study, can be easily hinder by all those assumptions that are on the blind spot until one learns to look for them and acknowledge them.

The assumption I had of research methodology was inclined towards a negative aversion based on ignorance and fear, thinking it is extremely hard and it would overcome my intellectual capacities. Even though I did find it complex and not easy to understand or follow, I realized it is designed to actually facilitate your way to create understanding or knowledge. By following all those steps and having to identify where are you standing before you even start the study, what are your

assumptions and beliefs, is helping to get each step of the process as clean of obstacles as possible, is teaching you to identify what is on your mind already that could be hindering a possibility during the path of searching and finding.

I realized that research methodology is the way that makes it possible to land all those ideas that could seem unreachable or too complex or too simple to dare passing through the scrutiny of a scientific method.

It was as surprising and rewarding for me to discover the skills I was developing during this process, when they started to become evident as I was spotting assumptions and beliefs towards other subjects in casual conversations.

I started to apply the reflection skills I was developing, to question my ways on the daily bases with the inexorable consequence of getting to know myself deeper. This was by far the most valuable gain I had by going through this process.



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## Appendix

### Questionnaire Sample

1. Are you familiar with the term Mediation?
  - Yes
  - No
2. Chose from the answers below the one that fits better your perception of mediation:
  - A) It's a private process in which parties to a dispute are told how to solve their conflict by a third neutral party.
  - B) It's a voluntary, private process in which parties to a dispute try to find a win-win solution with the help of a third neutral party.
  - C) It's a private process in which parties to a dispute expect a third neutral party decide who is right or wrong.
3. Is there an anti-bullying policy in the school?
  - Yes
  - No
4. If there is, how many times in this scholar year, had you have to use it?
  - 0
  - 1-5
  - 6-10
  - 11-20
  - 21+
  - There is no anti-bullying policy
5. How effective would you consider your anti-bullying policy is?
  - Poorly effective (Bullying behavior remained the same)

-Moderately effective (Bullying behavior diminished)

-Very effective (Bullying behavior stopped)

6. Is your school using mediation/peer mediation for conflict management?

-Yes

-No

7. Have you considered mediation to manage bullying in your school?

-Yes

-No

8. Proven is effective, would you consider implementing mediation to manage bullying in your school?

-Yes

-No

9. If you were to adopt mediation in your school, what would you think would be the main issue you would encounter?

-Lack of resources (money, time, infrastructure)

-Teachers resistance

-Parents resistance

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Is your school rural or urban?

-Rural

-Urban

11. The population of your school is:

-Mixed

-Girls

-Boys

## **Responses**

### **1. Are you familiar with the term Mediation?**

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

### **2. Chose from the answers below the one that fits better your perception of mediation:**

B) It's a voluntary, private process in which parties to a dispute try to find a win-win solution with the help of a third neutral party.

B) It's a voluntary, private process in which parties to a dispute try to find a win-win solution with the help of a third neutral party.

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B) It's a voluntary, private process in which parties to a dispute try to find a win-win solution with the help of a third neutral party.

**3. Is there an anti-bullying policy in the school?**

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

**4. If there is, how many times in this scholar year, had you have to use it?**

1-5

1-5

1-5

1-5



1-5

0

0

1-5

10-20

1-5

**5. How effective would you consider your anti-bullying policy is?**

Moderately effective (Bullying behavior diminished)

Very effective (Bullying behavior stopped)

Moderately effective (Bullying behavior diminished)

Moderately effective (Bullying behavior diminished)

Moderately effective (Bullying behavior diminished)

Very effective (Bullying behavior stopped)

Very effective (Bullying behavior stopped)

Moderately effective (Bullying behavior diminished)

Very effective (Bullying behavior stopped)

Moderately effective (Bullying behavior diminished)

**6. Is your school using mediation/peer mediation for conflict management?**

No

Yes

No

No

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

**7. Have you considered mediation to manage bullying in your school?**

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

No

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

**8. Proven is effective, would you consider implementing mediation to manage bullying in your school?**

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

Yes

**9. If you were to adopt mediation in your school, what would you think would be the main issue you would encounter?**

Lack of resources (money, time, infrastructure)

Teachers resistance

Parents resistance

Lack of resources (money, time, infrastructure)

Lack of resources (money, time, infrastructure)

Parents resistance

Parents resistance

Lack of resources (money, time, infrastructure)

We adopt it already

Lack of resources (money, time, infrastructure)

**10. Is your school rural or urban?**

Urban

Urban

Urban

Rural

Urban

Urban

Rural

Rural

Urban

Rural

**11. The population of your school is:**

Mixed

Boys

Mixed

Mixed

Mixed

Mixed

Mixed

Mixed

Mixed

Mixed

