Teachers' Intervention in School Bullying: A Qualitative Analysis on Italian Teachers

Daniela Acquadro Maran*, Maurizio Tirassa and Tatiana Begotti

Department of Psychology, University of Turin, Turin, Italy

The chances that a teacher will intervene in a case of bullying appear to be associated with several variables, which may be resumed as the confidence that he has in his capability to deal with problems at school. In accordance with Social Cognitive Theory and Attribution Theory, the three-factor model of self-confidence was used to investigate the differences between preservice teachers (PSTs) and in service teachers (ISTs). A qualitative approach was used to examine the strategies of intervention suggested against bullying at school by teachers. Results showed that there are different profiles to PSTs and ISTs. In both groups, participants with low outcome expectations (OEs) revealed a propension to intervention in the classroom, while those characterized by high external locus of control tend to intervene only upon the victims and the bullies. ISTs with high OEs are the group most likely to intervene directly, because they are self-confident in their abilities to put an end to the problem. Overall, the data show that professional experience is important for the interpretation of the phenomenon and remedies suggested. This does not mean that interventions suggested by IST are necessarily effective, but that they tend to have a stronger sense of self-efficacy.

Keywords: bullying, qualitative approach, victims, teacher, Italy

INTRODUCTION

School bullying is a serious and pervasive problem that has been scrutinized by psychologists, social scientists, and educators since at least the 1970s. It is defined as a repeated, intentionally aggressive behavior that involves an actual or perceived imbalance of power between the perpetrator(s) and the victim(s) (Olweus, 1993, 2003; Patton et al., 2017). Bullying generally occurs at school (in the classrooms, the hallways, the bathrooms, the courtyards, and so on) (Hong and Espelage, 2012) and may take different forms. In a dichotomous classification, it may be *overt* (consisting of material actions such as hitting, punching, or kicking, or verbal aggressions such as insults and threats) or *covert* (consisting of less visible acts, like gossiping, social exclusion, laughing at, and isolating) (Byers et al., 2011; Power-Elliott and Harris, 2012; Platt et al., 2016). Research has mostly studied bullying at the peer group level, emphasizing its role in influencing the current and future behaviors of the perpetrators, victims, and witnesses (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli, 2010; Boulton et al., 2017). However, while reactions from peers certainly affect how students may become involved in and cope with these events (Saarento et al., 2015), other facts are just as important.

Recent research has stressed the role of teachers in recognizing episodes of bullying and identifying their actors, as well as in preventing and intervening on them (DeOrnellas and Spurgin, 2017). Of course, teachers are continuously called upon to make decisions and act in these situations. This

reinforces or inhibits the various possible behaviors on the part of the bullies, the victims, and the bystanders (Craig et al., 2011), and in general affects how pupils perceive and react to bullying (Gini, 2005; Twemlow et al., 2006; Bjereld et al., 2017). Indeed, there is evidence showing that students who perceive their teachers as disapproving of bullying are less likely to bully others; conversely, bullying is more common when students feel that their teachers tolerate it (Saarento et al., 2013).

In line with these ideas, we will examine some professional and psychological factors that affect how teachers perceive bullying and the chances they have to successfully intervene.

The chances that a teacher will intervene in a case of bullying appear to be associated with several variables (Ettekal et al., 2015), which may be associated with the confidence he has in his capability to deal with problems at school (Nicolaides et al., 2002; Alvarez, 2007). When teachers feel capable of caring for students, promoting positive relations among them, and managing matters of both learning and behavior in positive ways, students are far less likely to become involved in bullying (Roland and Galloway, 2002).

Denzine et al. (2005) identified the different facets of this feeling of confidence in self-efficacy, outcome expectations (OEs), and the specific causal explanations that are given for the problem at hand. The first two variables are related to Social Cognitive Theory (Woolfolk et al., 1990), while the last refers to Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1986, 2010).

Self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) is an individual's subjectively perceived capability of coping with a certain task. A teacher's self-efficacy is his own "judgment of … his capabilities to bring about the desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001, p. 783). This is one of the most important variables related to both effective teaching strategies and positive student outcomes (Gibson and Dembo, 1984). Furthermore, teachers' self-efficacy correlates negatively with stress and burnout and positively with job satisfaction and commitment (Aloe et al., 2014; Zee and Koomen, 2016). Veenstra et al. (2014) showed that teachers' self-efficacy has a strong correlation with teachers' intervention against bullying; classes where teachers had high self-efficacy also had lower occurrences of bullying.

A different, but related, notion is that of OEs, defined as an agent's beliefs about the likely consequences of a specific action and the chances that a specific outcome will actually follow from his or her successfully performed behavior (Bandura, 1997; Denzine et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2005). Teachers' expectations about their students' positive outcomes affect how they themselves behave and interact with the students in the classroom (Skinner et al., 2014). High expectations correlate positively with the educational opportunities granted to the students and with the construction of a positive emotional climate in the classroom (Rubie-Davies, 2006). High expectations also push teachers to increase their efforts to cope with problematic situations at school (Schwarzer and Hallum, 2008).

Weiner (1986) distinguishes between OEs and locus of control. The latter is what an individual expects about his or her capability to control or reinforce their environment (Rotter, 1966;

Lachman, 2006). Teachers generally tend to attribute a student's failure to external causes (external locus of control), such as social distress, personal, or family problems, while crediting themselves for a student's success, attributing it to internal causes like their ability to challenge students (internal locus of control) (Wang et al., 2015). An internal locus of control is important for teachers' senses of responsibility and leads them to intervene actively in problematic situations at school, such as bullying episodes (Sarıçam et al., 2012).

This three-factor model of self-confidence [self-efficacy beliefs (SEB), OEs, and locus of control] is well known in school psychology investigations (Taimalu et al., 2007), and it has demonstrated promising results in explaining teachers' problems at school.

Literature analysis has shown that investigations on teachers' intentions to intervene in bullying episodes involve two different types of teachers: preservice teachers (PSTs), i.e., persons who have no teaching experience, but are following a training program that will prepare them to become teachers, and teachers in service (ISTs). These two populations turn out to have different attitudes toward bullying. In particular, PSTs perceive themselves as capable of effective intervention in cases of bullying, but not toward all the parties involved. In research conducted by Nicolaides et al. (2002), for example, PSTs felt more secure in supporting victims, such as by encouraging viewers to be more proactive. They were also willing to work with the families, in particular the parents of victims. However, they felt less confident working with the parents of bullies and directly dealing with bullies. PSTs studied by Kahn et al. (2012) said they were more likely to take action in response to overt aggression than to covert. However, the negative outcomes experienced by pupils regardless of the type of victimization is an indicator that these teachers were not trained and sensitized to address the problem properly.

ISTs are generally less likely to get involved and intervene personally in cases of relational aggression (Yoon and Kerber, 2003). This population is more prone to leave the solution to children, both bullies and victims (Yoon et al., 2016). They tend to have low confidence in their ability to deal effectively with bullying, which affects their willingness and ability to get involved. In contrast to them, ISTs with high self-efficacy tend to differentiate between the various strategies to cope with problem behaviors and change their goals according to students' needs and expectations (Zee and Koomen, 2016). When IST's self-efficacy is high, the students, too, perceive teachers as highly effective in combating bullying (Veenstra et al., 2014). Conversely, teachers with a low self-efficacy are perceived by students as less able to prevent bullying (Crothers and Kolbert, 2004). While teachers' attitudes and ways of intervention on bullying are routinely taken into account in the literature, investigations of the role of teaching experience are substantially lacking. In fact, beyond a teacher's theoretical knowledge, his professional experience can influence his self-confidence in dealing with problematic situations at school, and specifically his choices concerning the prevention of bullying and the intervention strategies to adopt when necessary.

On this basis, we intended to evaluate two questions: (i) whether PSTs and ISTs would recommended different strategies

of intervention on bullying and (ii) whether the different recommendations given by the two subject groups would be associated with different levels of self-confidence in dealing with problems at school.

Current Study

We adopted a qualitative approach to investigate the strategies recommended by the ISTs and PSTs and their self-confidence in dealing with problems at school. Adopting a qualitative method allows participants to express their understanding of the phenomenon, the ways to deal with it, the self-confidence in their roles based upon their own perceptions and experiences (Hopkins et al., 2013). The supplementary advantage offered by this method is that it allows a better understanding of the phenomenon and captures the respondents' points of view without predetermining their answers (Patton, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2013). Moreover, according to Nastasi and Schensul (2005), a qualitative approach permits researchers to focus on contextual factors that improve or debilitate the efficacy of interventions in specific school problems (Leech and Onwuegbuzie, 2008). This approach is widely used in social science research (Creswell, 2013), and regarding bullying, it has been used to investigate the descriptions of bullying behavior provided by teachers (Mishna et al., 2005) and the descriptions of the effectiveness of anti-bullying interventions provided both by teachers and students (Crothers and Kolbert, 2004).

The context of the current study is Italy, where national investigations show that the rate of bullying occurring "sometimes" or "more frequently" is 41.6% in primary schools and 26.4% in middle schools (Fonzi et al., 2014). The prevalence is 35.6% in students aged 12–19 years (Eurispes-Telefono Azzurro, 2007).

The general goal of our study was to evaluate whether teaching experience affects:

(i)   The strategies recommended by PSTs and ISTs to cope with bullying.
(ii) The relation between the strategies recommended by PSTs and ISTs and teachers' self-confidence in dealing with problems at school.

In accordance with the three-factor model reported above, we analyzed self-efficacy, OEs, and locus of control.

Given the lack of literature on this topic, we did not have specific hypotheses about the relationship between self-confidence and the strategies recommended by both PSTs and ISPs. We thus intended to analyze this from an explorative perspective.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

238 teachers, aged 22–65 (mean age 36.5 years, SD = 8), helped us collect the data. 110 (46.2%) were PSTs aged 22–52 (M = 27, SD = 6.8), almost all female (96%). They were recruited from a University in the North-West of Italy, where they were attending the last year of the Master's course in Educational Science. The rest were ISTs (n = 128, 53.8%) aged 25–65 (M = 46; SD = 9.3), most of them female (92%). They were recruited from a comprehensive

school[1] in the Province of Turin in North-West Italy. They were employed in kindergarten (21%), primary schools (63%), and lower and higher secondary schools (16%). 95% of them had more than 5 years of experience. The large prevalence of females in both groups reflects the data from national statistic reports (Istat, 2011).

Materials

Participants were asked to anonymously fill a self-administered questionnaire in several sections. The first section described the purpose of the questionnaire and contained the instructions for replying, the anonymity and privacy statements, and questions about the respondent's sex and age. For ISTs, there were additional questions about the number of years teaching and the school level in which they were teaching at that time (kindergarten, primary school, lower secondary school, or higher secondary school).

The second section of the questionnaire contained the qualitative investigation. The respondents were asked to think about a bullying episode in the classroom and then answer the following open question: "Please describe what you could do to stop bullying." They were also asked to describe what strategies they would suggest to pupils to stop bullying.

The third section of the questionnaire included different measures of the teachers' attitudes toward bullying and victimization, empathy toward the victims, likelihood of intervention in the case of overt and covert bullying, and their perceptions of self-confidence in dealing with problems at school.

To assess teachers' self-confidence in dealing with problems at school, the Teacher Efficacy Scale was used (TES: Gibson and Dembo, 1984). In particular, we used the three-factor model of TES (Denzine et al., 2005), which included the following: (i) three items measuring SEB (e.g., "If a student did not remember information I gave in a previous lesson, I would know how to increase his/her retention in the next lesson"); (ii) three items measuring OE (e.g., "When the grades of my students improve, it is usually because I found more effective teaching approaches") and (iii) four items measuring external locus of control beliefs (E-LOC) (e.g., "When it comes right down to it, a teacher really cannot do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his/her home environment"). Each item was measured on a 5-point scale (from 1 = strong disagreement to 5 = strong agreement). The internal consistency of our assessment as measured with Cronbach's alpha was as follows: SEB $\alpha = 0.58$ (range 3–15); OE $\alpha = 0.64$ (3–15); E-LOC $\alpha = 0.61$ (4–20).

Procedure

The data were collected by research assistants trained by the researchers. Each participant was given a printout of the questionnaire, the information letter, and the informed consent form in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. This procedure is

---

[1]In Italy, a *comprehensive school* is a school complex where various (or all) educational levels are present, typically from the primary to the higher secondary, which means that the ages of students will range from about 6 to about 19 years.

in accordance with the code of ethics of the Italian Association of Professional Psychologists and Italian law (the latter concerning privacy).

Preservice teachers were contacted at their academic courses. The questionnaires were group administered in classrooms before the beginning of a lesson and were returned immediately. The response rate was 100%.

ISTs completed the questionnaire at their workplace. The questionnaire was distributed to the entire teaching staff (200 teachers). A dedicated box had been left in the teacher's room where participants could post the questionnaire. This procedure had already been adopted in previous studies (Begotti et al., 2017), to preserve privacy and anonymity. A label on the box showed the title of the study, the deadline for collection, and the contact details of the researchers for information or support while answering the questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected 2 weeks later. The response rate was 64%.

Data Analysis

Content analysis methodology was used to process the answers to the open question about how to intervene to stop school bullying. Two text corpora were created with the answers given by PSTs and ISTs, respectively. Descriptive statistics were performed with SPSS 22. The results of the TES were used as illustrative variables. For this purpose, findings from the TES were categorized as a dichotomization (high SEB/low SEB, high OE/low OE, high E-LOC/low E-LOC) (on the base of mean value; for PST: SEB: M = 9.20, SD = 1.573; OE: M = 10.28, SD = 1.848; E-LOC: M = 9.99, SD = 2.179; for IST: SEB: M = 10.57, SD = 1.839; OE: M = 10.50, SD = 1.992; E-LOC: M = 12.59, SD = 2.868).

Alceste 4.6 was used to process the text corpora. "Alceste" is the acronym for *Analyse des Lexèmes Co-occurents dans les Énnoncés Simples d'un Texte* (*Analysis of the Co-occurring Lexemes within the Simple Statements of a Text*). This statistical software (Reinert, 1993, 2001) allows researchers to analyze word distribution in a text. First it identifies each word and its roots (like *discuss*, *discussing*, *discussion*, and so on), then it counts its occurrences and follows its distribution and associations within the text. A hierarchical classification of the corpus is thus produced,

whereby sentences are divided into elements (called E.C.U., that is, elementary context unit), based on end point. E.C.U.'s are then grouped into homogeneous classes based on the word roots they contain. Overall, this bears resemblance to cluster analysis as performed on numerical data. The presence of a certain word root is assumed to convey the conceptual framework of the clause, and the frequency with which it is used is assumed to be correlated to the importance that the respondent attributes to the relevant topic. In a further phase, the software performs a χ^2 test on the association between words and classes to identify the specific vocabulary of each cluster. As suggested by Annese and Mininni (2002), the results were examined by each author independently, who then jointly discussed the meaning attributed to the data until an agreement on the results was reached. Consistency was guaranteed by reproducibility (or intercode reliability).

RESULTS

Preservice Teacher

The PST corpus comprised 2,130 occurrences, of which 575 were distinct forms (mean frequency = 4.9 per form) and 521 were hapaxes, which are words used only once. The number of E.C.U.'s (elementary context units) was 118, of which 104 (88.1%) were analyzed in the subsequent steps.

The five most frequent word roots (associated forms) in the corpus were SCHOOL CLASS(ES) ($n = 25$), TALK(ING) ($n = 24$), DIALOGUE(S) ($n = 21$), BEHAVIOR(S) ($n = 21$), STUDENT(S) ($n = 19$), and INTERVEN(E,TION) ($n = 15$).[2]

Figure 1 shows the procedure used to form the classes; classes that are more similar to each other are closer in the figure.

Five classes emerging from the analysis accounted for as much as 91.7% of the variance. In **Table 1**, the characterizing words of each class are reported in the order of chi-squared (χ^2) results, together with the associated illustrative variables.

The classification procedure compared classes I and II to the others. Class I, labeled *Intervention in the classroom*, explained 10.6% of the variance. The most representative words in terms

_____

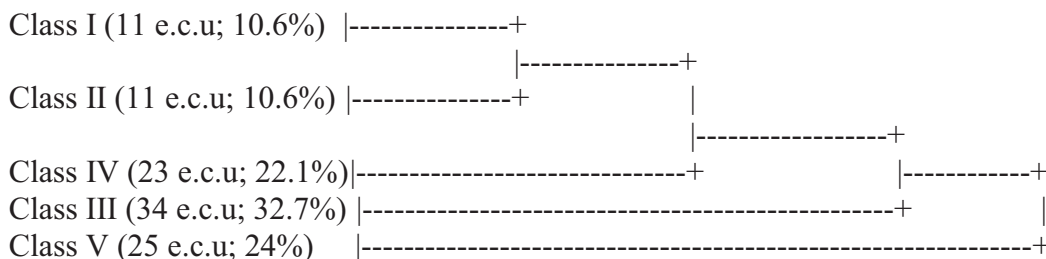[2]Throughout the article, word roots will be typed in SMALL CAPS.

FIGURE 1 | Dendrogram of stable classes—preservice teacher.

TABLE 1 | The first five words characterizing each class and chi-square—preservice teacher.

Class I		Class II		Class III		Class IV		Class V	
Illustrative variables: low outcome expectation		Illustrative variables: low E_LOC		Illustrative variables: absent		Illustrative variables: high E_LOC		Illustrative variables: absent	
	χ^2		χ^2		χ^2		χ^2		χ^2
experience+	44.41	work+	35.64	behavior+	31.87	student+	26.43	game+	23.72
dialog+	17.72	group+	32.71	famil+	13.49	victim+	6.12	role	22.69
student+	10.78	climate	29.38	caus+	10.81	relationship	5.35	psychologist	16.60
storytelling	10.28	relationship	21.18	motiv+	10.81	collaborat+	3.91	teacher	9.01
classroom	3.09	classroom	15.97	student+	3.75	bull+	3.89	interv+	8.24

of χ^2 describe a teacher's role as a type of DIALOGUE involving STUDENTS (e.g., "I will try to talk to students; I think intervention is possible using dialog").[3] It implies the involvement of the CLASSROOM and the STORYTELLING of the bullying EXPERIENCE ("I will pursue dialog in the classroom, fostering storytelling about the bulying episode and the pupils' experience"). The illustrative variable associated with this class was low OE. PSTs with low outcome expectancies tend to deal with bullying mostly through generic intervention, asking students to describe their experience and reflect on it.

Class II was labeled *Work within the group—change the classroom climate*. It also explained 10.6% of the variance. The most representative words in terms of χ^2 concern interventions on GROUPS built within the CLASSROOM to foster RELATIONSHIPS and a better CLIMATE ("I will create groups within the classroom, to think over on the relationship"). The goal of this WORK is, for example, the acceptance of diversity ("I will work on the importance of respecting diversity"). The illustrative variable associated with this class was low E_LOC. Thus, PSTs with a low external locus of control probably consider themselves capable of directly intervening against bullying, particularly by modifying group climates and soliciting reflection among students about group relationships.

Class IV was labeled *Focus on the victim* and explained 22.1% of the variance. The most representative words point to the opportunity to create good RELATIONSHIPS to foster COLLABORATION among STUDENTS ("I will create a good relation with the students"), to let the bullying episode and its protagonists emerge ("I will work day by day to bring out any episodes, who is the BULLY, who is the VICTIM"). The illustrative variable associated with this class was high E_LOC. This means that PSTs with a high external locus of control, different from those with a low external locus, tend to intervene in more limited ways, only taking into account bullies and victims. However, they do not suggest more constructive strategies to deal with the phenomenon beyond merely highlighting bullies and bullying.

Classes III and V had no illustrative variables. They contained non-specific words associated with the variables investigated. Class III, labeled *Where bullying comes from*, explained 32.7% of the variance and was referred to the MOTIVATIONS

and CAUSES of those BEHAVIORS. These were looked for in the STUDENTS relational, social, and economic conditions ("I would try to understand what that student is experiencing, what kind of difficulties"). Thus, intervention had to involve the FAMILY ("I will talk to the parents to understand where the problem arises").

Class V, labeled *Who might intervene*, explained 24% of the variance. The words characterizing this class refer to the professional ROLE that could INTERVENE in bullying. This is mainly the PSYCHOLOGIST, who is asked to prepare intervention (principally in the form of GAMES) and provide guidance to the TEACHER ("I think it is necessary to call in qualified personnel, such as psychologists").

IST

The IST corpus comprised 1,598 occurrences, of which 826 were distinct forms (mean frequency = 2.8 per form) and 347 were hapax. The number of E.C.U. was 132, of which 102 were analyzed (77.3%). The five most frequent words (associated forms) in the corpus were FAMIL(Y,IES) (18), INTERVEN(E,TION) (17), STUDENT(S) (16), BEHAVIOR(S) (16), and PARENT(S) (13).

The dendrogram in **Figure 2** shows the classification procedure used to form the classes and highlights which classes are closer, and therefore more similar. Four classes emerging from the analysis explained 90.9% of the variance. The classification procedure regroups classes I and III. The characterizing words of each class are shown in **Table 2** in the order of chi-squared results, together with their associated illustrative variables.

Class I explained 15.7% of the variance and was labeled *Proactive intervention*. The most representative words refer to the type of INTERVENTION to adopt in different SITUATIONS involving BULLYING ("I intervene when I witness bullying situations"). One such intervention is REASONING with the STUDENT ("In physical bullying, I will defend the victim and try to reason with the students on the consequences of their actions"). The illustrative variable associated with this class is high OE. Thus, ISTs with high OEs tend to intervene directly in the classroom, not only to put an end to bullying, but also to promote reflection among protagonists about the event.

Class II was labeled *Involvement of students and their parents* and explained 29.4% of the variance. This is a different type of intervention where teachers suggest involving STUDENTS, PARENTS, and other INSTITUTIONAL FIGURES, like other teachers, psychologists, and managers. The goal is to COMMUNICATE about the episode and to LISTEN to all the protagonists ("I listen

---

[3]Throughout the article, bracketed texts are taken from the participants' textual production.
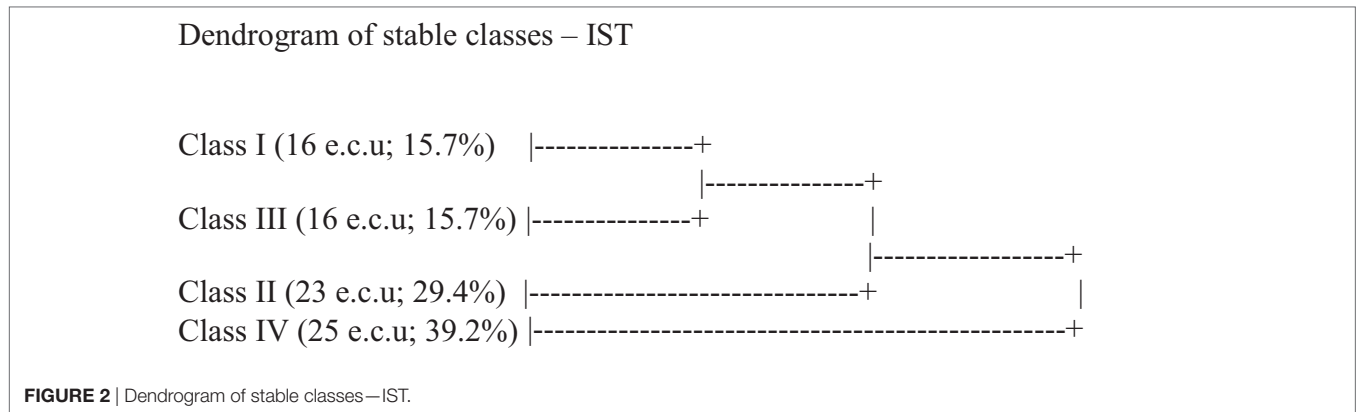
FIGURE 2 | Dendrogram of stable classes—IST.

TABLE 2 | The first five words characterizing each class and chi-square—IST.

Class I		Class II		Class III		Class IV	
Illustrative variables: high outcome expectation (OE)		Illustrative variables: low OE		Illustrative variables: high OE		Illustrative variables: absent	
	χ^2		χ^2		χ^2		χ^2
situation	19.40	student+	37.84	understand	33.85	famil+	17.85
reasoning	19.40	parent+	21.87	behavior+	6.83	activit+	15.30
interv+	15.18	listen+	12.62	bully+	3.99	classroom	11.10
bullying	4.96	institution+	9.99	dialog+	3.48	student+	8.15
student+	2.56	communic+	6.48	explan+	2.35	debate	5.21

to the student to understand what happened; I talk to parent, other teachers and the school manager and, if necessary, with the psychologist"). The illustrative variable associated with this class is low OE. ISTs with low OEs tend to suggest strategies specifically involving OTHERS.

Class III was labeled *Motivation* and explained 15.7% of the variance. Here, teachers described the importance to UNDER-STAND the BEHAVIOR of the BULLY. They search an EXPLANATION by DIALOGUE ("Dialog with the bully is always the best solution; I try to understand his/her motives"). The illustrative variable associated is high OE, like in Class I. ISTs with high external outcome expectancies tend to intervene, but they take into account only the protagonists of the episode, and particularly the bully, whose reasons they try to understand.

Class IV was labeled *Engage in activities* and explained 39.2% of the variance; it did not contain words associated with an illustrative variable. Data showed that teachers underline the importance of involving the FAMILY, the CLASSROOM, and the STUDENTS in ACTIVITIES like DEBATE ("It is important to create activities to be done in the classroom, involving families").

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the differences between PSTs and teachers in service (ISTs) concerning the strategies of intervention they suggest against bullying at school. According to the literature (Denzine et al., 2005), the chances that a teacher actually intervenes are associated with self-efficacy, OEs, and the causal explanation given of the phenomenon. The study conducted describes the different associations in PSTs and ISTs between self-confidence and recommended strategies.

The results showed that there are different profiles to PSTs and ISTs. In both groups, participants with low OEs revealed a propension to intervention in the classroom. However, PSTs devised only a generic intervention, in which students would be invited to describe their experience. Without a specific plan aimed at supporting the intervention, even potentially effective strategies might end up counterproductive (reverse buffering effect; see Kaufmann and Beehr, 1989). As emphasized by several authors (e.g., Duck, 2007), PSTs in their first approach to classroom management feel unprepared. These feelings increase in the face of behavior problems by students (Allen, 2010).

In contrast, ISTs with low OEs tend to involve not only students, but also the parents, colleagues, and managers. This is an instrumental and emotional support strategy to cope with the phenomenon (Carver et al., 1989) and is a request for attention, help, and support for all the parties involved, namely, the victims, bullies, other students, and the teachers themselves. This finding confirms the use of various strategies (e.g., proactive intervention, involving families and others) to cope with the problem (Zee and Koomen, 2016).

Preservice teachers and ISTs characterized by high external locus of control tend to intervene only upon the victims and the bullies. This finding partially confirms the results from Nicolaides et al. (2002), as PSTs in our study were more confident in dealing with bullies. The difference between the two groups is that ISTs aimed at understanding the bully's motivation, since experience suggests that the bullying behavior originated from a stressor. Thus, for ISTs, the source of distress is the variable on which to intervene. In line with these findings, Burger et al. (2015) found that most ISTs prefer to intervene directly on the bully in non-punitive ways.

Preservice teachers are also more likely to have a low external locus of control, and thus to ascribe changes in the relationships between students to their own behaviors in the classroom. Fajet et al. (2005) found that PSTs' perceptions about how to manage the classroom are grounded in their own experiences as students. They carry these perceptions with them through their studies, their training, and even their early years of teaching (Allen, 2010).

However, to devise an intervention modeled on one's experience as a student may become dangerous, since high expectations unsupported by reality can result in burnout (Gold and Roth, 2013; Pillen et al., 2013; Converso et al., 2015).

ISTs with high OEs are the group most likely to intervene directly, because they are self-confident in their abilities to put an end to the problem. Thus, ISTs with high OEs are more likely to get involved and to not leave the solution to children (see Yoon and Kerber, 2003; Yoon et al., 2016). Furthermore, they have an array of strategies available to meet the students' needs and expectations (Zee and Koomen, 2016). Teaching experience, particularly when shared with a supporting community of practice (the entire teaching staff), allows a clearer and deeper grasp of when and how to intervene. ISTs thus find themselves continuously learning from experience in ways both formal (e.g., attending professional workshops) and informal (e.g., talking with colleagues) (Olsen, 2015). This could be the first strategy to deal with the problem in classroom; as described above, when a teacher's self-efficacy is high, students perceive teachers as highly effective in combating bullying (Veenstra et al., 2014).

Overall, the data show that professional experience is important for not only self-efficacy, OEs, and the type of causal explanation given of bullying but also for the interpretation of the phenomenon and remedies suggested. For example, both PSTs and ISTs may have a high external locus of control. What appears to change is the kind of explanations given for bullying (e.g., viewing it as grounded in the family vs. in classroom dynamics), the kind of intervention(s) devised (upon the individual vs. upon the group), and the approach to both the victim and the perpetrator (direct intervention of the teacher vs. involvement of other institutional agents). Professional experience allows for a wider range of possible interpretations and thus a wider range of remedies suggested (Sokol et al., 2016). This does not mean that interventions suggested by ISTs are necessarily effective, but simply that they tend to have a stronger sense of self-efficacy.

There are, of course, limitations to this study. First, since the sample was non-randomly selected, the results should be taken with caution and not be generalized. Moreover, the participants' possible previous experiences with bullying (as victims, bullies, bystanders, or other roles) were not investigated; such experience, however, would likely affect one's perception (Kallestad and Olweus, 2003). Third, the different definitions of bullying given by teachers (PSTs and ISTs) were not explored. We suggest that future studies examine the various bullying definition by PSTs and ISTs and analyze their roles in influencing current and future interventions in bullying situations. For example, a student's behavior of excessively laughing at others (and the students' consequence of fear of being laughed at) could be underestimated

or not considered as a bullying behavior, though it might cause great distress in the victim (Proyer et al., 2012).

Despite these limitations, we hope this study offers interesting insights and suggests implications for educational systems. First, as far as the Italian system is concerned, we argue that adding specific training on bullying to university education courses might improve the chances of more effective interventions (Nicolaides et al., 2002); at present, no such training exists. The course should focus not only on the mere event of bullying, but also on its nature and causes, the protagonists, and the possible coping strategies with respect to the perpetrators, the victims, the classroom, and the colleagues, along with other relevant institutional roles. Teachers recognized as experts on the issue could be involved to describe possible individual- and school-level policies and to suggest how to manage the classroom in different contexts and situations (Allen, 2010). Moreover, we suggest the use of training strategies, usually not utilized at schools but well known in other contexts (such as health care institutions) (Rankin et al., 2015). We refer to coaching and mentoring approaches based on the role of the most-expert professional (Ghislieri et al., 2009); the role of senior teachers, who are well trained in dealing with bullying, could be pivotal to providing high-quality intervention in less-expert teachers (both PSTs and ISTs). Finally, the support offered by a counselor could improve a teacher's self-confidence in dealing with bullying at school, recognizing the different overt and covert episodes, and identifying better strategies to cope with them. In most Italian schools, the supervision of a counselor is provided for students only. Our hope is to extend counseling to teachers.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Each participant was given a printout of the questionnaire, the information letter, and the informed consent form in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. This procedure is in accordance with the code of ethics of the Italian Association of Professional Psychologists and the Italian law (the latter concerning privacy).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

DA, TB, and MT: substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; final approval of the version to be published; and agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

REFERENCES

Allen, K. P. (2010). Classroom management, bullying, and teacher practices. *Prof. Educ.* 34, 1.

Aloe, A. M., Amo, L. C., and Shanahan, M. E. (2014). Classroom management self-efficacy and burnout: a multivariate meta-analysis. *Educ. Psychol. Rev.* 26, 101–126. doi:10.1007/s10648-013-9244-0

Alvarez, H. K. (2007). The impact of teacher preparation on responses to student aggression in the classroom. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* 23, 1113–1126. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2006.10.001

Annese, S., and Mininni, G. (2002). "La focus group discussion tra analisi del contenuto e analisi del discorso [the focus group discussion between content analysis and discourse analysis]," in *Metodi qualitativi in psicologia sociale. [Qualitative Methods in Social Psychology]*, ed. B. M. Mazzara (Roma: Carocci), 125–147.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control*. New York: Freeman.

Begotti, T., Tirassa, M., and Acquadro Maran, D. (2017). School bullying episodes: attitudes and intervention in pre-service and in-service Italian teachers. *Res. Pap. Educ.* 32, 170–182. doi:10.1080/02671522.2016.1158857

Bjereld, Y., Daneback, K., and Petzold, M. (2017). Do bullied children have poor relationships with their parents and teachers? A cross-sectional study of Swedish children. *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.* 73, 347–351. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.01.012

Boulton, M. J., Boulton, L., Down, J., Sanders, J., and Craddock, H. (2017). Perceived barriers that prevent high school students seeking help from teachers for bullying and their effects on disclosure intentions. *J. Adolesc.* 56, 40–51. doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.11.009

Burger, C., Strohmeier, D., Spröber, N., Bauman, S., and Rigby, K. (2015). How teachers respond to school bullying: an examination of self-reported intervention strategy use, moderator effects, and concurrent use of multiple strategies. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* 51, 191–202. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2015.07.004

Byers, D. L., Caltabiano, N. J., and Caltabiano, M. L. (2011). Teachers' attitudes towards overt and covert bullying, and perceived efficacy to intervene. *Aust. J. Teach. Educ.* 36, 8. doi:10.14221/ajte.2011v36n11.1

Carver, C. S., Scheier, M. F., and Weintraub, J. K. (1989). Assessing coping strategies: a theoretically based approach. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.* 56, 267. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.56.2.267

Converso, D., Viotti, S., Sottimano, I., Cascio, V., and Guidetti, G. (2015). [Work ability, psycho-physical health, burnout, and age among nursery school and kindergarten teachers: a cross-sectional study]. *Med. Lav.* 106, 91–108.

Craig, K., Bell, D., and Leschied, A. (2011). Pre-service teachers' knowledge and attitudes regarding school-based bullying. *Can. J. Educ.* 34, 21–33.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Crothers, L. M., and Kolbert, J. B. (2004). Comparing middle school teachers' and students' views on bullying and anti-bullying interventions. *J. Sch. Violence* 3, 17–32. doi:10.1300/J202v03n01_03

Denzine, G. M., Cooney, J. B., and McKenzie, R. (2005). Confirmatory factor analysis of the teacher efficacy scale for prospective teachers. *Br. J. Educ. Psychol.* 75, 689–708. doi:10.1348/000709905X37253

DeOrnellas, K., and Spurgin, A. (2017). "Teachers' perspectives on bullying," in *Bullying in School*, eds L. H. Rosen, K. DeOrnellas, and S. R. Scott (USA: Palgrave Macmillan), 49–68.

Duck, L. (2007). Using sounder foundations to help avoid the "why new teachers cry" phenomenon. *Clear. House J. Educ. Strateg. Issues Ideas* 81, 29–36. doi:10.3200/TCHS.81.1.29-36

Ettekal, I., Kochenderfer-Ladd, B., and Ladd, G. W. (2015). A synthesis of person-and relational-level factors that influence bullying and by standing behaviors: toward an integrative framework. *Aggress. Violent Behav.* 23, 75–86. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2015.05.011

Eurispes-Telefono Azzurro. (2007). *8° Rapporto Nazionale sulla Condizione dell'infanzia e dell'adolescenza [8th National Report on Childhood and Adolescence]*. Rome: Eurispes-Telefono Azzurro.

Fajet, W., Bello, M., Leftwich, S. A., Mesler, J. L., and Shaver, A. N. (2005). Pre-service teachers' perceptions in beginning education classes. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* 21, 717–727. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2005.05.002

Fonzi, A., Genta, M. L., Menesini, E., Bacchini, D., Bonino, S., and Costabile, A. (2014). "Italy," in *The Nature of School Bullying: A Cross-National Perspective*, eds P. K. Smith, Y. Morita, J. Junger-Tas, D. Olweus, R. Catalano, and P. Slee (London, New York: Routledge), 140–156.

Ghisleri, C., Gatti, P., and Quaglino, G. P. (2009). Factors affecting willingness to mentor. *Int. J. Educ. Vocation. Guid.* 9, 205–219. doi:10.1007/s10775-009-9164-1

Gibson, S., and Dembo, M. H. (1984). Teacher efficacy: a construct validation. *J. Educ. Psychol.* 76, 569. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.76.4.569

Gini, G. (2005). Bullying as a social process: the role of group membership in students' perception of inter-group aggression at school. *J. Sch. Psychol.* 44, 51–65. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2005.12.002

Gold, Y., and Roth, R. A. (2013). *Teachers Managing Stress & Preventing Burnout*. London: Routledge.

Hong, J. S., and Espelage, D. L. (2012). A review of research on bullying and peer victimization in school: an ecological system analysis. *Aggress. Violent Behav.* 17, 311–322. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2012.03.003

Hopkins, L., Taylor, L., Bowen, E., and Wood, C. (2013). A qualitative study investigating adolescents' understanding of aggression, bullying and violence. *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.* 35, 685–693. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.01.012

Istat. (2011). *Rilevazione sulle forze di lavoro [Labour Force Survey]*. Available at: https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/forze+di+lavoro

Kahn, J. H., Jones, J. L., and Wieland, A. L. (2012). Preservice teachers' coping styles and their responses to bullying. *Psychol. Sch.* 49, 784–793. doi:10.1002/pits.21632

Kallestad, J. H., and Olweus, D. (2003). Predicting teachers' and schools' implementation of the Olweus bullying prevention program: a multilevel study. *Prev. Treat.* 6, 21a. doi:10.1037/1522-3736.6.1.621a

Kaufmann, G. M., and Beehr, T. A. (1989). Occupational stressors, individual strains, and social supports among police officers. *Hum. Relations* 42, 185–197. doi:10.1177/001872678904200205

Lachman, M. E. (2006). Perceived control over aging-related declines adaptive beliefs and behaviors. *Curr. Dir. Psychol. Sci.* 15, 282–286. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8721.2006.00453.x

Leech, N. L., and Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2008). Qualitative data analysis: a compendium of techniques and a framework for selection for school psychology research and beyond. *Sch. Psychol. Q.* 23, 587. doi:10.1037/1045-3830.23.4.587

Mishna, F., Scarcello, I., Pepler, D., and Wiener, J. (2005). Teachers' understanding of bullying. *Can. J. Educ.* 28, 718–738. doi:10.2307/4126452

Nastasi, B. K., and Schensul, S. L. (2005). Contributions of qualitative research to the validity of intervention research. *J. Sch. Psychol.* 43, 177–195. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2005.04.003

Nicolaides, S., Toda, Y., and Smith, P. K. (2002). Knowledge and attitudes about school bullying in trainee teachers. *Br. J. Educ. Psychol.* 72, 105. doi:10.1348/000709902158793

Olsen, B. (2015). *Teaching What They Learn, Learning What They Live: How Teachers' Personal Histories Shape Their Professional Development*. New York: Routledge.

Olweus, D. (1993). Victimization by peers: antecedents and long-term outcomes. *Soc. Withdraw. Inhib. Shy. Child.* 315, 341.

Olweus, D. (2003). A profile of bullying at school. *Educ. Leadersh.* 60, 12–17.

Patton, D. U., Hong, J. S., Patel, S., and Kral, M. J. (2017). A systematic review of research strategies used in qualitative studies on school bullying and victimization. *Trauma Violence Abuse* 18, 3–16. doi:10.1177/1524838015588502

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Two decades of developments in qualitative inquiry: a personal, experiential perspective. *Qual. Soc. Work* 1, 261–283. doi:10.1177/1473325002001003636

Pillen, M., Beijaard, D., and Brok, P. D. (2013). Tensions in beginning teachers' professional identity development, accompanying feelings and coping strategies. *Eur. J. Teach. Educ.* 36, 240–260. doi:10.1080/02619768.2012.696192

Platt, T., Proyer, R. T., Hofmann, J., and Ventis, W. L. (2016). Gelotophobia in practice and the implications of ignoring it. *Eur. J. Humour Res.* 4, 46–56. doi:10.7592/EJHR2016.4.2.platt

Power-Elliott, M., and Harris, G. E. (2012). Guidance counsellor strategies for handling bullying. *Br. J. Guid. Counc.* 40, 83–98. doi:10.1080/03069885.2011.646947

Proyer, R. T., Neukom, M., Platt, T., and Ruch, W. (2012). Assessing gelotophobia, gelotophilia, and katagelasticism in children: an initial study on how six to nine-year-olds deal with laughter and ridicule and how this relates to bullying and victimization. *Child Indic. Res.* 5, 297–316. doi:10.1007/s12187-011-9127-1

Rankin, J., McGuire, C., Matthews, L., Russell, M., and Ray, D. (2015). Facilitators and barriers to the increased supervisory role of senior charge nurses: a qualitative study. *J. Nurs. Manag.* 24, 366–375. doi:10.1111/jonm.12330

Reinert, M. (1993). Les 'mondes lexicaux' et leur 'logique' à travers l'analyse statistique d'un corpus de récits de cauchemars. *Lang. Soc.* 66, 5–37. doi:10.3406/lsoc.1993.2632

Reinert, M. (2001). Alceste, une méthode statistique et sémiotique d'analyse de discours: application aux "Rêveries du promeneur solitaire". *Rev. Fr. Psychiatr. Psychol. Méd.* 5, 32–36.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., Nicholls, C. M., and Ormston, R. (eds) (2013). *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Roland, E., and Galloway, D. (2002). Classroom influences on bullying. *Educ. Res.* 44, 299–312. doi:10.1080/0013188022000031597

Rotter, J. B. (1966). Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement. *Psychol. Monogr. Gen. Appl.* 80, 1. doi:10.1037/h0092976

Rubie-Davies, C. M. (2006). Teacher expectations and student self-perceptions: exploring relationships. *Psychol. Sch.* 43, 537–552. doi:10.1002/pits.20169

Saarento, S., Boulton, A. J., and Salmivalli, C. (2015). Reducing bullying and victimization: student-and classroom-level mechanisms of change. *J. Abnorm. Child Psychol.* 43, 61–76. doi:10.1007/s10802-013-9841-x

Saarento, S., Kärnä, A., Hodges, E. V., and Salmivalli, C. (2013). Student-, classroom-, and school-level risk factors for victimization. *J. Sch. Psychol.* 51, 421–434. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2013.02.002

Salmivalli, C. (2010). Bullying and the peer group: a review. *Aggress. Violent Behav.* 15, 112–120. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2009.08.007

Salmivalli, C., Lagerspetz, K., Björkqvist, K., Österman, K., and Kaukiainen, A. (1996). Bullying as a group process: participant roles and their relations to social status within the group. *Aggress. Behav.* 22, 1–15. doi:10.1002/(SICI)1098-2337(1996)22:1<1::AID-AB1>3.0.CO;2-T

Sarıçam, H., Duran, A., Çardak, M., and Hamaltov, M. (2012). The examination of pre-school teacher candidates' academic locus of control levels according to gender and grade. *Mevlana Int. J. Educ.* 2, 67–74.

Schwarzer, R., and Hallum, S. (2008). Perceived teacher self-efficacy as a predictor of job stress and burnout: mediation analyses. *Appl. Psychol.* 57, 152–171. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.2008.00359.x

Skinner, A. T., Babinski, L. M., and Gifford, E. J. (2014). Teachers' expectations and self-efficacy for working with bullies and victims. *Psychol. Sch.* 51, 72–84. doi:10.1002/pits.21735

Sokol, N., Bussey, K., and Rapee, R. M. (2016). Teachers' perspectives on effective responses to overt bullying. *Br. Educ. Res. J.* 42, 851–870. doi:10.1002/berj.3237

Taimalu, M., Kikas, E., Hinn, M., and Niilo, A. (2007). Teachers' self efficacy, teaching practices, and teaching approaches: adaptation of scales and examining relations. *Teach. Pers. Professional.* 80, 51–78.

Tschannen-Moran, M., and Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: capturing an elusive construct. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* 17, 783–805. doi:10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00036-1

Twemlow, S. W., Fonagey, P., Sacco, F., and Brethour, J. R. (2006). Teachers who bully students: a hidden trauma. *Int. J. Soc. Psychiatry* 52, 187–198. doi:10.1002/car.1025

Veenstra, R., Lindenberg, S., Huitsing, G., Sainio, M., and Salmivalli, C. (2014). The role of teachers in bullying: the relation between antibullying attitudes, efficacy, and efforts to reduce bullying. *J. Educ. Psychol.* 106, 1135–1143. doi:10.1037/a0036110

Wang, H., Hall, N. C., and Rahimi, S. (2015). Self-efficacy and causal attributions in teachers: effects on burnout, job satisfaction, illness, and quitting intentions. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* 47, 120–130. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2014.12.005

Weiner, B. (1986). *An Attributional Theory of Motivation and Emotion*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Weiner, B. (2010). The development of an attribution-based theory of motivation: a history of ideas. *Educ. Psychol.* 45, 28–36. doi:10.1080/00461520903433596

Williams, D. M., Anderson, E. S., and Winett, R. A. (2005). A review of the outcome expectancy construct in physical activity research. *Ann. Behav. Med.* 29, 70–79. doi:10.1207/s15324796abm2901_10

Woolfolk, A. E., Rosoff, B., and Hoy, W. K. (1990). Teachers' sense of efficacy and their beliefs about managing students. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* 6, 137–148. doi:10.1016/0742-051X(90)90031-Y

Yoon, J., and Kerber, K. (2003). Bullying: elementary teachers' attitudes and intervention strategies. *Res. Educ.* 69, 27–35. doi:10.7227/RIE.69.3

Yoon, J., Sulkowski, M. L., and Bauman, S. A. (2016). Teachers' responses to bullying incidents: effects of teacher characteristics and contexts. *J. Sch. Violence* 15, 91–113. doi:10.1080/15388220.2014.963592

Zee, M., and Koomen, H. M. (2016). Teacher self-efficacy and its effects on classroom processes, student academic adjustment, and teacher well-being a synthesis of 40 years of research. *Rev. Educ. Res.* 86, 981–1015. doi:10.3102/0034654315626801