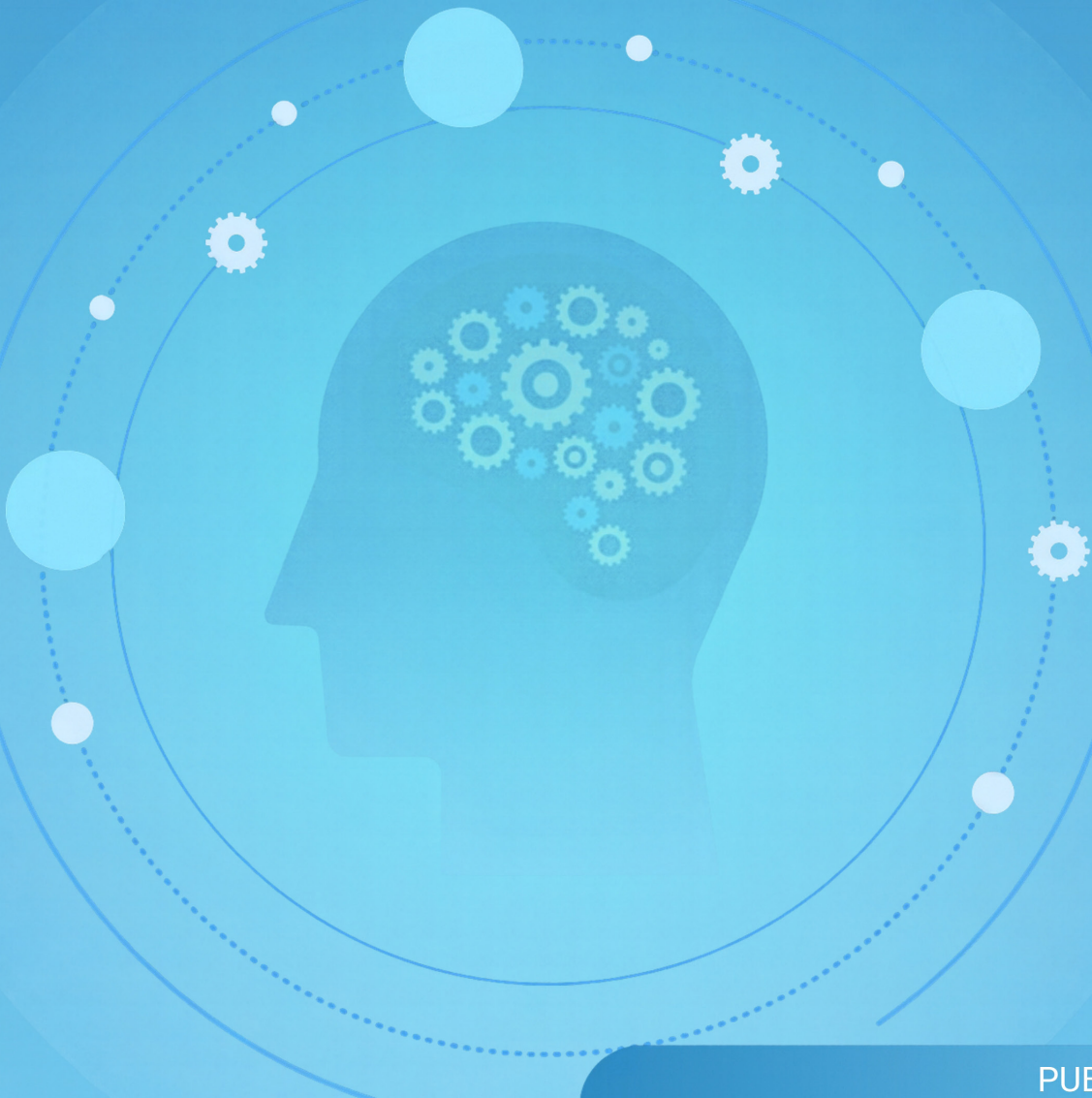




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The Micro-Sociology of the Classroom: Group Boundaries, Collective Aggression, and Pedagogical Agency in Student Mobbing

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ABSTRACT

Student mobbing is examined in this conceptual article as a collective and relational classroom process rather than as a simple accumulation of individual bullying incidents. Drawing on micro-sociology, social semiotics, peer-group research, and scholarship on classroom interaction, the article develops the Classroom Mobbing Multimodal Framework (CMMF). The framework addresses a gap between approaches that explain bullying primarily through individual perpetrator-victim relations and approaches that recognise peer-group processes without systematically integrating the multimodal resources through which exclusion is enacted. CMMF conceptualises collective exclusion through four interconnected dimensions: linguistic, embodied, spatial, and digital. Its analytical premise is that no isolated sign constitutes evidence of mobbing; rather, meaning emerges through recurrence, coordination, sequence, and context. The article also positions pedagogical agency as relational and situated. Teachers are not expected to monitor students continuously or to infer harmful intent from subtle behaviour. Instead, CMMF is proposed as a heuristic for professional reflection, contextual interpretation, documentation, dialogue, and modification of classroom conditions. An illustrative vignette and coding example demonstrate how the four dimensions could be operationalised in future empirical research. The framework is not a validated diagnostic instrument and the article reports no empirical testing. Its contribution is therefore theoretical and methodological: it provides a structured proposition for examining how collective exclusion may emerge across interactional, group, and pedagogical levels and identifies directions for future qualitative, multimodal, and mixed-methods validation.

INTRODUCTION

Research on school bullying has generated a substantial body of knowledge about aggression, victimization, peer relations, and the roles of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. Yet some forms of persistent peer exclusion are difficult to understand if they are reduced to individual acts directed by one student toward another. In classroom settings, exclusion can become embedded in everyday relations: students may coordinate their responses, reinforce one another's judgments, control access to groups, circulate labels, or use apparently minor communicative acts to position a peer as an outsider. The cumulative effect may be more significant than any single incident.

The concept of student mobbing is useful in this context because it directs attention to collective organization. The term does not imply that every case of bullying is collective or that all students participate in the same way. Rather, it provides a conceptual lens for examining situations in which exclusionary conduct becomes socially distributed and sustained through group relations. The classroom is therefore approached as a micro-social setting in which identities, alliances, boundaries, norms, and hierarchies are continuously negotiated (Potamias, 2026a, 2026b; Nikolidakis&Potamias, 2026).

A micro-sociological approach makes it possible to examine what happens between and among students

during ordinary classroom life. Interactional routines, seating arrangements, participation patterns, joking, silence, gaze, bodily orientation, movement, and digital communication can all contribute to the production of inclusion and exclusion. Such resources are not necessarily aggressive in themselves. Their significance depends on how they are organized in a particular interactional context and how repeatedly they position particular students (Nikolidakis & Kosmas, 2025; Nikolidakis& Kota, 2025, 2026).

This perspective also requires a multimodal approach. Classroom communication is not limited to spoken or written language. Meaning is produced through the coordination of linguistic, visual, embodied, spatial, material, and digital resources. A student who is repeatedly ignored, physically isolated, interrupted, excluded from a group chat, or positioned at the margins of a classroom may experience a pattern that cannot be adequately represented by counting verbal incidents alone.

The article consequently develops two related arguments. First, student mobbing can be understood as a relational and micro-social process in which group boundaries are constructed and maintained through multimodal interaction. Second, pedagogical agency should be conceptualized as the teacher's capacity to intervene in these processes by modifying the interactional conditions through which exclusion is reproduced (Nikolidakis *et al.*,

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2026).

The main conceptual contribution is the Classroom Mobbing Multimodal Framework (CMMF). The framework organizes analysis around four interconnected dimensions—linguistic, embodied, spatial, and digital—and asks how these dimensions converge in the production of collective exclusion. The purpose is not to create another checklist for identifying bullying. Instead, the CMMF provides a way of examining the organization of classroom relations and the accumulation of multimodal signs over time (Potamias, 2026a, 2026b).

LITERATURE REVIEW

From Bullying to Student Mobbing: Reconsidering Collective Peer Aggression

Bullying research has traditionally emphasized repeated aggressive behavior, an imbalance of power, and the relationship between perpetrator and victim. This conceptualization remains important, particularly for recognizing harmful behavior and establishing protective responses. Nevertheless, classroom experiences of exclusion may involve more complex configurations in which several students participate in different ways (Olweus, 1993; Potamias&Kanari, 2026).

Salmivalli's (2010) participant role approach significantly expanded bullying research by demonstrating that bullying is not a simple interaction between a bully and a victim. Instead, classmates participate through multiple roles, including assistants, reinforcers, defenders, and outsiders. This perspective highlights the collective nature of bullying and demonstrates that peer groups play an active role in maintaining or challenging aggressive processes. Student mobbing represents an intensified form of this collective dynamic. It occurs when exclusion becomes embedded within group relations and when multiple students contribute, directly or indirectly, to the marginalization of a peer. The group does not necessarily operate through explicit coordination; rather, shared assumptions and informal norms gradually produce alignment around a common target.

This process resembles what social psychologists describe as group-based categorization, where individuals strengthen their own group identity by distinguishing themselves from an outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Within classrooms, students may construct belonging through subtle processes of similarity and difference. A student perceived as unusual, socially isolated, academically different, or resistant to dominant peer expectations may become positioned as an outsider.

The transformation from individual difference to collective exclusion represents a crucial sociological process. The targeted student becomes not merely someone who experiences negative behavior but someone whose social identity is reconstructed through collective interpretation. Labels, rumors, jokes, and repeated interactions gradually produce a shared narrative about who the student is and what position they occupy within the classroom community (Nikolidakis, & Kosmas, 2025).

The Micro-Sociology of Classroom Life

The micro-sociological tradition provides a powerful framework for understanding how everyday interactions produce social order. Goffman's (1959, 2005) analysis of face-to-face interaction demonstrated that individuals constantly engage in impression management, seeking recognition and maintaining social identities through interaction rituals. In classroom settings, students participate in similar processes as they negotiate status, belonging, and acceptance.

From a Goffmanian perspective, exclusion occurs when interaction rituals fail or when particular individuals are denied the recognition necessary for maintaining a positive social identity. A student who is repeatedly ignored, interrupted, laughed at, or excluded from collaborative activities experiences not only individual rejection but symbolic loss of membership within the classroom community (Nikolidakis, *et al.*, 2026).

Collins' (2004) theory of interaction ritual chains further explains how groups develop emotional solidarity through repeated interactions. Successful interaction rituals generate shared emotional energy, collective identity, and group belonging. However, these same mechanisms may contribute to exclusion when solidarity is constructed through opposition to another student. In such cases, collective cohesion is achieved through the creation of a common outsider.

The classroom therefore functions as a social arena where belonging and exclusion are continuously produced. Student mobbing emerges when interaction rituals become organized around collective targeting rather than mutual recognition (Nikolidakis, & Kota, 2026). Furthermore, these interaction rituals are deeply intertwined with the formal and informal evaluative processes within the classroom. Student assessment does not operate in a vacuum; it serves as a primary mechanism of political and social socialization, actively shaping power dynamics, peer hierarchies, and the moral order of the classroom (Eleftherakis, Linardakis, & Eleftherakis, 2023). When assessment practices inadvertently reinforce rigid categorizations of "success" or "failure," they provide the structural scaffolding upon which peer groups construct exclusionary boundaries, thereby transforming academic disparities into social marginalization.

Group Boundaries and Collective Aggression in the Classroom

The emergence of student mobbing can be understood as a process of boundary construction within the classroom social system. Groups are not naturally formed entities with fixed characteristics; rather, they are continuously produced through everyday interactions, shared meanings, and processes of inclusion and exclusion. In classroom environments, peer groups develop implicit rules regarding acceptable behavior, appearance, academic performance, communication styles, and social participation. These rules operate as informal norms that regulate belonging and determine who is recognized as a

legitimate member of the collective.

From a sociological perspective, boundaries become socially significant when they create distinctions between “insiders” and “outsiders.” Lamont and Molnár (2002) argue that symbolic boundaries are essential mechanisms through which social groups define similarity and difference. Within classrooms, symbolic boundaries may be constructed around seemingly minor characteristics, such as personality traits, academic abilities, language use, cultural background, physical appearance, or social competence. However, when these differences become attached to negative meanings, they may function as mechanisms of exclusion.

Student mobbing develops when symbolic boundaries are transformed into social barriers. The targeted student becomes positioned as someone who does not fully belong to the classroom community. Importantly, this process does not necessarily require explicit aggression from every member of the peer group. Instead, exclusion often emerges through collective alignment, where students gradually adopt similar interpretations and responses toward the targeted individual.

This process is closely connected to the sociological concept of scapegoating. According to Girard (1986), groups may maintain internal cohesion by directing tensions and frustrations toward a specific individual who becomes symbolically responsible for perceived problems within the collective. In classroom contexts, the scapegoated student may become associated with negative narratives such as being “different,” “difficult,” “weak,” or “responsible” for social discomfort. Once such narratives become established, subsequent interactions are interpreted through this negative framework.

The process of collective aggression is therefore not simply the accumulation of individual aggressive acts. It represents a transformation of the social meaning of a student within the classroom environment. Behaviors that might initially appear insignificant, such as laughter, avoidance, exclusion from activities, or refusal to collaborate, become meaningful because they participate in a broader system of group positioning (Nikolidakis, & Potamias, 2026).

Thornberg (2015) emphasizes that bullying and exclusion in schools are embedded within moral and social processes through which students negotiate what is considered acceptable behavior. Peer groups often develop collective justifications that normalize exclusion, presenting aggressive actions as legitimate responses to the targeted student’s supposed characteristics. Through this process, responsibility becomes diffused across the group, making intervention more difficult.

The phenomenon of collective aggression is particularly challenging for teachers because it frequently operates below the threshold of visible misconduct. Traditional disciplinary approaches often focus on identifiable actions, such as verbal insults or physical aggression, while overlooking the subtle interactional processes through which exclusion is produced. Consequently,

understanding student mobbing requires attention to the everyday micro-interactions that construct classroom reality.

Bullying has been interpreted as a collective process, which can be socially constructed as justified, through targeting, stigmatization and attribution of blame to the victim (Forsberg & Thornberg, 2016), as non-participants justify their reduced empathy by attributing responsibilities to the victim, whom they consider different from the rest of the group (Berger, 2007). Within this context, group members tend to submit to the respective group expectations (Nipedal *et al.*, 2010), as the weak often want to identify with the strong in order to feel more secure and confident. As mobbing is a group phenomenon, there are specific mechanisms that we can assume take place when some individuals engage in acts of emotional abuse (Olweus, 1993). Many studies suggest that both children and adults behave more aggressively in response to observing an aggressive model. The effect of observation will be stronger when the observer makes a positive evaluation of the model, for example, considers him tough, strong, fearless. This theory seems to apply in the case of supporters where the instigators play the role of the model. Those most affected by such models are usually students who are insecure and dependent (passive bullies), who have not spontaneously found their natural place among their peers and try to impose it. This type of effect is called social contagion (Galanis & Triantafyllidou-Galani, 2004). Ultimately, in environments where fear replaces creative dialogue, social capital, that is, the advantage that comes from investing in social relationships, is eroded, replacing trust with a sick culture that conveys the implicit message of tolerance, but often also of reward, towards the phenomena of moral harassment and bullying (Kazaki, 2025).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Multimodality and Classroom Mobbing: The Semiotic Construction of Exclusion

Traditional approaches to school bullying have primarily focused on observable verbal and physical behaviors. However, contemporary theories of communication and social interaction demonstrate that human meaning-making extends beyond spoken language. Classrooms are inherently multimodal environments where students communicate through multiple semiotic resources, including speech, gesture, facial expression, gaze, posture, movement, spatial organization, digital communication, and silence.

From a social semiotic perspective, meaning is produced through the interaction of multiple modes rather than through language alone (Kress, 2010). Every communicative act involves choices regarding how meaning is represented and interpreted within a particular social context. Therefore, student mobbing should be examined not only through what students say but also through how exclusion is communicated through embodied and spatial practices.

A student may rarely experience direct verbal aggression while simultaneously being subjected to systematic multimodal exclusion. For example, the absence of eye contact, the refusal of peers to respond during classroom discussions, the deliberate avoidance of physical proximity, the exclusion from group formations, or the collective laughter following a student's contribution may function as powerful mechanisms of social positioning. These practices communicate belonging or non-belonging without requiring explicit statements of rejection (Nikolidakis, *et al.*, 2026).

Jewitt (2014) argues that multimodality provides analytical tools for examining how social relations are constructed through the combination of different modes. In the classroom, social hierarchies and peer relationships are continuously displayed and negotiated through multimodal interaction. Seating arrangements, bodily orientation, participation patterns, and digital exchanges all contribute to the construction of classroom identities. Within this framework, student mobbing can be conceptualized as a multimodal process of identity transformation. The targeted student gradually becomes represented through a network of negative signs that circulate within the classroom community. A facial expression, a repeated joke, a silence following a student's comment, or exclusion from a digital group may appear individually insignificant. However, when these practices occur repeatedly and become socially coordinated, they produce a cumulative experience of marginalization (Potamias & Kanari, 2026).

The concept of multimodal exclusion extends the understanding of bullying by demonstrating that aggression is not always directly expressed. Instead, exclusion may operate through absence, invisibility, and restricted participation. Silence, in particular, becomes a significant communicative resource. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) argue, social communication includes not only what is expressed but also what is systematically omitted or withheld. In classroom mobbing, silence may communicate rejection, indifference, or collective agreement with exclusionary practices.

The Classroom Mobbing Multimodal Framework (CMMF)

Building upon social semiotic theory, classroom interaction research, and school bullying literature, this article proposes the Classroom Mobbing Multimodal Framework (CMMF) as a conceptual model for analysing the early indicators of collective exclusion (Nikolidakis, & Potamias, 2026).

The framework conceptualizes student mobbing as the interaction of four interconnected dimensions: linguistic, embodied, spatial, and digital.

Linguistic Dimension

The linguistic dimension concerns the ways in which speech and writing position students in classroom interaction. It includes insults, derogatory labels, sarcasm,

teasing, interruptions, repeated negative references, dismissive comments, and the circulation of narratives about a particular student (Kress, 2010; Jewitt, 2014).

The analytical issue is not simply whether offensive language occurs. It is how language contributes to the construction of a social position. Repeated naming practices, for example, may turn a temporary characteristic into a stable identity category within the peer group. Similarly, jokes may function as mechanisms of exclusion when they repeatedly mark one student as an acceptable object of ridicule.

The linguistic dimension also includes silence and non-response when these operate communicatively within an interaction. A student's contribution that is systematically ignored can acquire a meaning different from an isolated failure to respond.

Embodied Dimension

The embodied dimension includes gaze, posture, facial expression, gesture, bodily orientation, proximity, avoidance, and other forms of embodied interaction. Such resources can communicate affiliation, rejection, threat, embarrassment, or indifference (Jewitt, 2014).

Embodied signs are particularly important because they may operate below the level of explicit awareness. A group may turn toward one another while excluding another student from the interaction, or students may use facial expressions and gestures to communicate judgments without verbalizing them (Papadopoulou & Vasileiou, 2026).

Again, the framework does not assume that an isolated gesture is evidence of aggression. Its relevance depends on repetition, coordination with other modes, and its position within the interactional sequence.

Spatial Dimension

The spatial dimension concerns the organization and use of classroom space. Seating arrangements, physical distance, access to shared materials, movement between groups, and positioning at the margins of activities can all contribute to the experience of inclusion or exclusion (Jewitt, 2014; Kress, 2010).

Space is therefore not merely a physical background to classroom interaction. It can become part of the social organization of the group. Repeatedly placing a student at the periphery, preventing access to a group, or controlling physical proximity can communicate and reinforce group boundaries.

Spatial analysis is particularly useful when exclusion is normalized and therefore difficult to recognize as a discrete incident. A pattern of positioning may be visible only when classroom arrangements are examined over time.

Digital Dimension

The digital dimension extends classroom relations into online spaces. Messaging applications, social networking environments, shared platforms, online games, and class-

related digital communication can become sites in which group boundaries are reproduced (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015; Akkerman & Bakker, 2011).

Digital exclusion may involve removing a student from a group, ignoring messages, circulating humiliating material, creating parallel conversations, or coordinating responses outside the classroom. These practices may affect classroom relations even when they occur beyond school premises (Slonje *et al.*, 2012; Malama, 2015).

The digital dimension should therefore not be treated as a separate form of bullying detached from classroom life. Digital communication can intensify existing group relations and introduce new opportunities for coordination, persistence, and visibility.

The shift toward digital platforms in education carries significant emotional and psychological implications, where students may experience heightened anxiety or a sense of alienation if these systems lack inclusive design. Furthermore, as recent conceptual frameworks emphasize, digital tools should not remain static but can be utilized as dynamic sensors to model and mitigate negative emotional states, such as anxiety, which often intersect with peer exclusion and digital marginalization (Moukatzi, Eleftherakis, & Zaranis, 2026). Thus, the digital dimension of mobbing is not only about peer-to-peer online aggression but also about how the technological ecosystem itself mediates social inclusion or psychological distress. In addition to providing new forms of bullying, technology has paved the way for greater blurring of boundaries for bullying engagement in settings such as school, home, and cyberspace (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). Home may once have been a protective space from which school bullying was shielded, but cyberspace transcends these geographic boundaries (Reyes & Diaz, 2026).

Convergence of the Four Dimensions

The main analytical value of the CMMF lies in the convergence of its dimensions. Collective exclusion becomes more visible when linguistic, embodied, spatial, and digital patterns are examined together.

For example, a student may be repeatedly mocked verbally, met with laughter and dismissive gestures, placed outside preferred groups, and excluded from a digital peer network. No single element necessarily establishes student mobbing. Their recurrence and coordination, however, may indicate that a broader relational pattern is operating.

The framework therefore treats multimodality as a way of reconstructing the organization of interaction. It is not intended as a scoring system. Its purpose is to guide close examination of how different resources participate in the production and maintenance of group boundaries.

At the same time, teachers may be online and understand the nature and use of electronic media, but they rarely if ever move in the same electronic spaces as their students, as a result of which they cannot quickly and satisfactorily understand what exactly the children are expressing (Eden *et al.*, 2013).

The CMMF proposes that student mobbing becomes identifiable when multiple semiotic modes converge around a consistent pattern of exclusion. A single gesture or isolated incident does not necessarily indicate mobbing. However, when linguistic, embodied, spatial, and digital indicators repeatedly reinforce one another, they reveal an emerging social structure of marginalization. The following vignette is hypothetical and is included solely to demonstrate how CMMF might be operationalised in future research. It is not presented as empirical evidence. During a group task, Student A proposes an idea. Two peers exchange a glance and laugh; one student interrupts and says, “Here we go again.” When groups are formed, the same peers move their chairs together and leave Student A without a clear place. A class messaging group later contains a parallel conversation from which Student A is excluded. A teacher initially observes only the verbal interruption and laughter.

The analytical value of the vignette lies in the configuration rather than in any single event. The phrase “Here we go again” may be ambiguous in isolation. The glance and laughter are also ambiguous in isolation. The spatial reorganisation may result from ordinary group

Table 1: Illustrative CMMF coding logic for a hypothetical classroom episode

Episode element	Mode	Possible interpretation	Evidence needed	CMMF status
“Here we go again” after Student A speaks	Linguistic	Dismissal or recurrent labelling	Sequence, repetition, tone, peer responses	Provisional indicator
Glance and shared laughter	Embodied	Affiliation among peers; possible ridicule	Who is looked at, recurrence, timing	Provisional indicator
Chairs moved together; no place for A	Spatial	Possible boundary maintenance	Prior seating patterns, alternatives available	Provisional indicator
Parallel group chat excludes A	Digital	Possible extension of peer boundary	Purpose of group, membership rules, recurrence	Context-dependent indicator
All four recur across episodes	Convergence	Potentially stable exclusionary pattern	Longitudinal evidence and triangulation	Analytical hypothesis

preferences. The digital exclusion may have multiple explanations. When these events recur and reinforce the same social positioning, however, they become analytically relevant as a possible pattern of collective exclusion. The framework therefore directs attention toward evidence of recurrence and convergence while preserving alternative explanations.

Multimodal Indicators and Early Pedagogical Detection

A multimodal approach can contribute to earlier pedagogical recognition of problematic classroom dynamics. Early detection does not mean labeling students on the basis of isolated behaviors. It means developing a more sensitive understanding of repeated changes in participation, affiliation, positioning, and interaction (Nikolidakis & Kota, 2025).

Potential indicators include persistent interruption of one student's contributions, recurring ridicule, coordinated laughter, avoidance of eye contact, withdrawal from group activities, repeated spatial marginalization, changes in peer participation, and digital exclusion. These indicators become meaningful when considered longitudinally and in relation to the wider classroom context.

The teacher's observational position is important here, but observation should not be understood as detached surveillance. Teachers are themselves participants in classroom interaction. Their expectations, routines, grouping decisions, responses to conflict, and distribution of attention can influence the social conditions in which exclusion develops (Nikolidakis & Kosmas, 2025).

The CMMF can therefore be used as an interpretive framework for professional reflection. Teachers can document recurring patterns, compare interactional episodes, consider alternative explanations, and examine whether particular students are consistently positioned at the margins of classroom life. Such analysis can help distinguish isolated disagreement from more persistent processes of collective exclusion.

Pedagogical Agency and Teacher Intervention in Classroom Mobbing

Pedagogical agency is central to the framework because the analysis of classroom exclusion has little practical value if it does not inform educational action. Teacher agency should not be reduced to the capacity to punish perpetrators or protect victims after an incident has occurred. It also includes the capacity to reshape the interactional environment (Nikolidakis & Kosmas, 2025; Potamias, 2026a).

Intervention may involve reorganizing groups, changing participation structures, making classroom norms explicit, creating opportunities for cooperative interaction, addressing exclusionary language, and opening spaces for students to reflect on peer relations. These actions do not guarantee the disappearance of exclusion, but they can modify the conditions under which exclusion is reproduced (Potamias, 2024; Tsiakalos, 2008). The original

discussion also emphasized cooperative and democratic pedagogy, collective responsibility, prevention of stigmatization, explicit rules and limits, and cooperation beyond the school (Holtappels & Tillmann, 1999, as cited in Tsiakalos, 2008; Sharp & Smith, 1994).

The multimodal perspective also broadens the range of possible intervention. If exclusion is produced through several modes, intervention can operate across several modes as well. A teacher may alter spatial arrangements, redistribute opportunities for participation, challenge recurring linguistic labels, or establish expectations for digital communication.

Pedagogical agency also involves interpretation. Teachers need to avoid premature conclusions because the same observable behavior can have different meanings in different contexts. A multimodal and micro-sociological approach encourages teachers to ask how an interaction fits into a larger pattern before assigning a label to it.

This approach places professional judgment at the center of intervention. Teachers need evidence, contextual understanding, and dialogue with students rather than reliance on isolated signs. The objective is not merely to identify a perpetrator and a victim but to understand the relational conditions that allow exclusion to become normalized.

Proposed Methodological Framework: A Multimodal Micro-Sociological Approach

Because the present article is conceptual, the methodological framework is proposed rather than empirically tested. Its purpose is to provide a basis for future qualitative and mixed-methods research into classroom mobbing (Potamias, 2026a, 2026b).

A multimodal micro-sociological study could begin with the identification of naturally occurring interactional episodes in which exclusion is suspected. Data could include classroom observations, field notes, audio or video recordings where ethically and legally appropriate, seating maps, student-produced materials, interviews, reflective journals, and relevant digital communication. The selection of data should be guided by research questions rather than by an assumption that a particular student is responsible for the problem (Goodwin, 1994; Jewitt, 2014).

The next stage would involve identifying recurring patterns across interactional episodes. Researchers could examine who speaks, who is interrupted, who receives responses, how students orient their bodies, how groups form, how space is occupied, and how digital interactions relate to classroom relations.

The analysis should then consider multimodal convergence. A linguistic event would be examined in relation to accompanying embodied and spatial resources and, where relevant, digital activity. Attention should also be paid to temporal recurrence: whether similar configurations appear repeatedly and whether they contribute to a stable group boundary.

Interpretation would require contextual triangulation.

Student perspectives, teacher observations, and interactional data should be compared rather than treated as interchangeable sources. Ethical safeguards are especially important when research involves children and potentially harmful peer relations (Khanolainen *et al.*, 2026).

The framework can therefore support several methodological designs, including qualitative case studies, interactional ethnography, multimodal discourse analysis, and mixed-methods research combining systematic observation with sociometric or survey data. Its contribution is to connect these methods through a common focus on the organization of collective exclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The conceptual synthesis generated by CMMF connects three analytical levels that are often separated: interaction, group organisation, and pedagogical intervention. At the interactional level, attention is directed to situated meaning-making. At the group level, repeated configurations are examined as mechanisms through which boundaries of belonging are stabilised. At the pedagogical level, the analysis asks how classroom organisation and teacher responses may alter the conditions under which exclusion is reproduced. The contribution is therefore integrative rather than empirical (Potamias, 2026a, 2026b; Nikolidakis *et al.*, 2026).

At the interactional level, the framework draws attention to the situated production of meaning. At the group level, it examines how repeated interactions establish boundaries of belonging and exclusion. At the pedagogical level, it considers how teachers can intervene in these processes by changing the organization of classroom interaction.

This connection has several theoretical implications. First, it challenges approaches that treat bullying exclusively as a dyadic relation. While individual aggression remains important, collective exclusion requires attention to the wider peer ecology in which aggression acquires social support or legitimacy.

Second, the framework strengthens the role of multimodality in research on peer relations. Exclusion is not always verbalized. It may be communicated through coordinated bodily behavior, spatial positioning, visual cues, or digital practices. Examining these resources together can reveal dimensions of classroom life that remain invisible in language-centered approaches.

Third, the framework conceptualizes pedagogical agency as relational. Teachers do not simply intervene in an already existing social reality. Their classroom practices help shape participation, visibility, grouping, and interaction. Consequently, prevention and intervention can involve changes in classroom organization as well as direct responses to harmful behavior (Potamias, 2024).

Finally, the framework suggests that student mobbing should be studied longitudinally. Collective boundaries are rarely created in a single moment. They are produced through repetition. Future research should therefore

examine how small interactional events accumulate and how particular students become progressively positioned as insiders, outsiders, or peripheral members of the classroom community.

The conceptual status of the CMMF also needs to be acknowledged. It is not presented as a validated diagnostic instrument, nor does it provide a numerical measure of mobbing. Its value is heuristic: it organizes attention toward the multimodal and relational processes through which collective exclusion may develop. Empirical studies are needed to examine its applicability, reliability, and usefulness across different age groups, school contexts, and cultural settings.

The framework has several limitations. It is conceptually derived and has not been empirically tested. The four dimensions are analytically useful but not necessarily exhaustive, and their boundaries are porous. CMMF also risks privileging what is observable to researchers while underrepresenting private meanings and experiences. Furthermore, the term “mobbing” may overlap with established terminology such as bullying, group-based bullying, relational aggression, and collective aggression. Future empirical work should test whether the concept provides sufficient discriminative value to justify its use across contexts.

A second limitation concerns interpretation. Multimodal analysis can generate rich contextual accounts, but it can also invite subjective inference. This is why the proposed methodology emphasises recurrence, sequence, triangulation, alternative explanations, and transparent coding. Future studies should develop coding protocols and test whether trained analysts reach sufficiently consistent interpretations without reducing multimodal analysis to an overly rigid checklist.

CONCLUSION

Student mobbing can be understood more fully when classroom exclusion is examined as a collective and multimodal process. The relevant social reality is not limited to individual aggressive acts. It also includes the interactional patterns through which group boundaries are established, maintained, and normalized.

The Classroom Mobbing Multimodal Framework offers a conceptual structure for examining these processes through linguistic, embodied, spatial, and digital dimensions. Its central proposition is that the significance of individual signs emerges from their relation to other signs, their recurrence, and their role within broader patterns of classroom interaction.

The framework also places pedagogical agency at the center of the analysis. Teachers can influence the conditions under which exclusion develops by reorganizing participation, space, grouping, communication, and classroom norms. This does not turn teachers into sole agents responsible for peer relations; rather, it recognizes their position as important participants in the construction of classroom social life.

Further research should test the framework empirically,

examine its applicability across different educational contexts, and investigate how multimodal observation can be integrated into teacher education and professional development. Such work may contribute to approaches to student mobbing that move beyond incident-based identification toward a deeper understanding of how classroom relations are produced and how they can be changed.

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