

Research shows how computers can help combat bullying in schools

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University of Kent research has demonstrated how computer mediation could help combat bullying in schools.

The six-month study focussed on pupils aged 12-13 and their use of technology including ‘avatars’, or computer-generated images of themselves, to resolve potential conflict at school.

Key findings were that pupils using software which incorporates the latest gesture and facial recognition technology felt more positive towards other pupils. Specifically, pupils using avatars liked and trusted their partner significantly more. They were also able to produce better ideas to alleviate [bullying](#) issues.

Prior to the study, avatar-mediated communication was believed to be less effective than video-mediated communication. However, newer technologies, which have developed avatars that respond to facial and gesture cues, can improve social interaction. Avatar technology is of particular interest for tackling bullying issues because of its ability to protect users’ anonymity.

The research team was led by Dr Jim Ang and Ania Bobrowicz, from the University’s School of Engineering and Digital Arts. They worked in collaboration with Kent Integrated Youth Service and Project Salus, with pupils from Borden Grammar School, Sittingbourne, the Archbishop’s School, Canterbury and St Anselm’s Roman Catholic [School](#), Canterbury.

Jim Ang, Lecturer in Multimedia and Digital Systems, said: ‘Advances in avatar technology have great potential to transform the way we connect and empathise with each other using computers. And, as our research has shown, it’s an excellent platform to help young people, who are very comfortable with all forms of technology, to resolve conflict in schools.’

Ania Bobrowicz, Senior Lecturer in Digital Arts, added: ‘It was exciting to see the enthusiasm with which the pupils embraced our project. We are planning to take the findings from the project into the next stage to investigate the effectiveness of using avatar technology with [pupils](#) with social interaction and learning difficulties in mainstream education.’

Provided by University of Kent

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