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The phenomenon of bullying: a comparative study of Spain and Finland

Występowanie zjawiska bullyingu w Hiszpanii i Finlandii – analiza porównawcza

Abstract

The article focuses on comparing two approaches in bullying prevention: the one in Aragon (Spain) with the one in Finland. The Finnish KiVA method is very new and can bring about great progress in detecting and dealing with bullying. The KiVA programme consists of lessons and work done during a course of study. Depending on the level of education, an educational unit will consist of a talk on how to respect others and how to work in a group. The most essential aspect of it is that the pupils understand the importance of preventing and stopping bullying. In this way, instead of supporting the bully, pupils would support the victim, thus conveying that they do not agree with bullying actions. Other methods focus only on the victim and the bully, but the Kiva programme emphasises involving and educating all peers and observers.

Key words: bullying, classroom, KiVa method, victim, aggressor.

Streszczenie

W artykule tym skoncentrowano się na porównaniu dwóch podejść do zapobiegania i działania w zakresie zjawiska bullyingu: podejścia stosowanego w Aragonii (Hiszpania) z podejściem stosowanym w Finlandii. Fińska metoda KiVA jest metodą nową i może stanowić duży postęp w wykrywaniu i radzeniu sobie z bullyingiem. Program KiVA jest cyklem spotkań lekcyjnych, w ramach których w zależności od poziomu nauczania realizuje się określone scenariusze. Rozmawia się o tym, jak szanować innych, jak pracować w grupie. Najistotniejsze jest to, aby uczniowie zrozumieli, jak ważne jest zapobieganie bullyingowi i jego powstrzymywanie. W ten sposób zamiast wspierać dręczyciela, będą oni wspierać ofiarę, dając tym samym do zrozumienia, że nie zgadzają się na takie działania. Inne metody skupiają się tylko na ofierze i dręczycielu, a w programie KiVA kładzie się nacisk na zaangażowanie i edukację wszystkich rówieśników i obserwatorów.

Słowa kluczowe: bullying, klasa szkolna, metoda KiVA, ofiara, agresor.

Introduction

Bullying is an issue that is gaining more and more importance when it comes to the proper management of coexistence in the classroom as it is an increasingly

common source of conflict that significantly affects both the students and the general atmosphere of the classroom as well as having many other negative consequences for the psychology and well-being of the students.

Finland's education system is considered one of the most effective in the world and that is why we have decided to take a closer look at its bullying prevention and management system by examining and comparing it with that of our autonomous Aragon community. In the last decades, Spain has created an exhaustive protocol of action that we are also going to comment on and analyse in terms of its effectiveness. Likewise, its actions will be assessed in relation to the data collected on the causes and motives underlying this type of conduct from the perspective of its theoretical framework.

We will start by trying to delimit the term bullying or school harassment in order to be able to analyse its causes subsequently. The two anti-bullying methods will then be presented theoretically and compared in the following section, after which we will draw our conclusions. Bullying is becoming a frequent problem in schools. Bullying is, in essence, deliberate violence or mistreatment by one or more students against another – peer violence or mistreatment – which is carried out systematically and persistently and creates an imbalance of power in which the conditions of aggressor and victim can be clearly identified[1].

Bullying can occur in different forms including physical, verbal, relational and psychological. All of them produce negative effects of varying intensity on the victim. Bullying occurs in different spaces whose differentiation is relevant to understand its modalities and also the responsibilities for its prevention and control. Such spaces can be intra-school, external to the school and even in the sphere of social networks.

The present review approaches the analysis of the phenomenon of bullying from a comparative perspective, between the Spanish case – more specifically Aragon – and that of Finland. Bullying is an issue that is gaining more and more importance as it is an increasingly common source of conflict that significantly affects both students and the general classroom environment, as well as having many other negative consequences for the psychology and well-being of students.

Finland's education system is considered one of the most effective in the world and that is why this review will approach its bullying prevention and management system by examining and comparing it with that of the Autonomous Community of Aragon.

Theoretical framework

Bullying is commonly classified as "bullying between peers". One of the first definitions of this term was given by the Norwegian Olweus who began to define it by explaining that "a schoolchild suffers violence or harassment ("mobben"), when

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[1] D. Olweus, *Aggression in the schools: Bullies and whipping boys*, Washington DC, Hemisphere 1978.

he/she is repeatedly and prolongedly subjected to the negative acts of one or more other schoolchildren"[2]. It was from this point onwards that the concepts began to be developed, so that one of the most complete descriptions that can be found would be: establishment and maintenance of unbalanced power relations between subjects who live together in shared contexts of the school environment, over long periods of time, in which dynamics of domination and submission are established, leading to aggression from those who exercise power in an abusive way towards those who are subjected to the role of targets or victims of such abuse. All of this in a knowledge and consent shared by the vast majority of those who observe it daily in the coexistence of the constituted group without doing anything to undo this imbalance[3].

Based on the above, we can highlight that: it must be a repetitive and intentional behaviour and the victim must be in a situation of defencelessness and non-provoking behaviour. In addition, it should be noted that for a bullying situation to be identified as such, there must be knowledge or consent from the rest of the peer group, who are mostly inactive in relation to the situation.

Oñederra[4] adds that "direct contact between victim and aggressor in a certain space is not even necessary" and this is what we would refer to as cyberbulling, however the present discussion is not going to consider this type of bullying alongside with that which can be actually perceived in the physical space of an educational centre. It is Palomero and Fernández[5] who also give us other relevant data on bullying, such as, for example, that among boys its most common manifestations are verbal abuse as well as physical aggression, while among girls it can manifest itself as social isolation and is generally more subtle. They also explain that bullying is more common between 11 and 14 years of age and decreases from this age onwards, and that the most common place where bullying occurs is the playground followed by classrooms and the corridors.

From the definitions we can extract that it requires an imbalance of power, the inactivity of peers and, above all, the fact of staying together in the same space for a prolonged period of time.

The bigger the school, the more cases of bullying there are and it also refers to the lack of surveillance in the corridors and relationships between pupils and teachers in the classroom as well as a bad capacity of conflict management and resolution[6]. In

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[2] D. Olweus, *Low school achievement and aggressive behavior in adolescent boys*, Magnusson y Allen (dirs.), « Human development. An interactional perspective », Nueva York, Academic Press 1983.

[3] J.-M. Avilés, Irurtia M.J., García-López L.J. & Caballo V.E., *El maltrato entre iguales: bullying*, "Behavioral Psychology/ Psicología Conductual", no 19.

[4] J. Oñederra, *Bullying: concepto, causas, consecuencias, teorías y estudios epidemiológicos,* Presentation, XXVII Cursos de Verano EHU-UPV Donostia-San Sebastián 2008.

[5] J.E. Palomero Pescador & Fernández Domínguez M. R., *La violencia escolar, un punto de vista global, "*Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado", 2001, no 41.

[6] H. L. Senovilla, *Bullying: un miedo de muerte.* Retrieved from: http://www.guiainfantil.com/educacion/escuela/acosoescolar/causas.htm

other words, we can say that school can provoke competitiveness, and the stress of coexistence combined with an authoritarian education system can result in the appearance of conflict and aggressiveness in the school.

The family is the first environment in which the child develops, so a family environment that is unstructured, conflictive or lacking in affection sometimes makes individuals turn to violence to defend themselves. Oñederra[7] also mentions behaviours apprehended from adults, which we group into family causes. It could also be related to the frustration factor which provokes aggression, or to mimetics, imitating the desires of others and ending up with a "mimetic" behaviour.

The KiVa method in Finland

Many of the sources cited claim that KiVa means 'well-being' in Finnish and although it is true that the word Kiva means "good", the creators of this method claim that it is an acronym representing the words "kiusaamista vastaan" which translates as "against bullying"[8].

Researchers agree that one of the main reasons for bullying is a great need for status, visibility and dominance of some students; bullying hides behind an individual's desire to achieve a social status of high acceptance towards a group of students and that an aggressive attitude can achieve and maintain that kind of status.

Looking at the possible causes, an attempt to attract attention or to seek popularity may be favoured by the fact of "breaking the rules" so common in the need to create one's own identity, which is part of the development of adolescent psychology.

The method consists of 3 units spread throughout the students' school development, the first unit being presented when they are 7–9 years old, the second between 10–13 years old and the third unit between 13–16 years old[9] Each of these units consists of 20 sessions in which children learn about empathy, learn to identify cases of bullying and the consequences they imply. These 20 hours are taught by the teachers themselves and cover assemblies, educational videos on bullying, role plays, written assignments and debates, among others[10]. The key issue here is the

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[7] J. Oñederra, *Bullying: concepto, causas, consecuencias, teorías y estudios epidemiológicos,* Presentation, XXVII Cursos de Verano EHU-UPV Donostia-San Sebastián 2008.

[8] C. Salmivalli, Garandeau C. F. & Veenstra R., *KiVa anti-bullying program: Implications for school adjustmen*t, "Peer relationships and adjustment at school", US: IAP Information Age Publishing. 2012.

[9] C. Salmivalli, Garandeau C. F. & Veenstra R., *KiVa anti-bullying program: Implications for school adjustmen*t, "Peer relationships and adjustment at school", US: IAP Information Age Publishing. 2012.

[10] L. Reynolds, *Case Study 1: An Evidence-Based Practice Review Report Theme: School Based Interventions for Learning Is the KiVa Anti-bullying Programme an Effective School-based Intervention for Reducing Bullying and Victimisation?* (Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology), University College of London 2001.

fact that they are offered tools that allow them to identify when a peer is being bullied and different ways to act accordingly to stop it. For unit 3, older children can also access a forum called "Kiva Street" where they can continue to learn about the topic by interacting with other users.

Contrary to many anti-bullying systems, the KiVa method does not focus on victims or bullies, thus the focus is not on the main figures in the conflict separately, but on the group. It is directed at the bystanders, because if it is the group that does not encourage this attitude, does not laugh or applaud the bullying, it will not fulfil one of its main objectives and will decrease the motivation of the bully. In other words, the key to the success of the KiVa method is not a regulation, but the acceptance of the fact that the observers are not neutral, and it is their reaction that maintains or diminishes the bullying. If the observers reward their behaviour, this will encourage it to continue, but if what they do is to defend the victim, the bully will want to avoid this bad social response to his behaviour and it is possible that he will restrain from such actions.

The KiVa team is made up of teachers and psychologists: as soon as a case of bullying is detected, they have interviews with the bully(s), the victim and their families, following up on the case, in addition to which they choose between 4 or 6 classmates considered popular who are involved in the conflict resolution process[11].

In addition to this, we find that members of this team are positioned in places such as recesses or corridors to identify this type of bullying, wearing waistcoats that remind students that they have to follow what they have learned through the KiVa method and that any student can resort to. It is these people who should be on the lookout for any signs of bullying.

Posters about the KiVa method will also be displayed in the corridors as a reminder to follow its principles. One of the less talked about points of the KiVa method is that it is a private method and not a public one. The situation is not that all schools have unlimited free access to this system but only schools that choose to pay for it will get the training and access to the materials to work with their students.

Bullying in Aragon: prevention and action protocol

In order to lay the foundations we mainly talk about the regulations and we mention Article 55 of Decree 73/2011, of 22 March, of the Government of Aragon which stipulates that "Conduct by pupils contrary to school coexistence that occurs within the school premises or during the performance of complementary and extracurricular activities must be corrected".

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[11] L. García-Ajofrín, *La fórmula de Finlandia para combatir el 'bullying'*. "El País", 2018. In: https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/11/06/planeta_futuro/1541516726_663171.html

One of the most important points regarding the identification of bullying is that we have a telephone contact free of charge, a physical address and an e-mail address where we can report cases of bullying in order to receive the necessary help, but it is the schools that must take a responsibility.

Subsequently, we analyse all the regulations of the ORDER ECD/1003/2018, of 7 June, which refers to theoretical plans on attention and training in terms of communication, socio-emotional factors of students and teachers, equality and inclusion, as well as an action protocol and a coexistence and equality team.

The profile of the student helper is discussed: volunteers who offer to assist other classmates in difficult situations and, among other things, raise awareness of the use of social networks and adopt the role of big brother to first year students. Most importantly, they act as mediators in case of conflict following the guidelines of a real mediator team. In addition to peer action, individualised tutoring is also taken into account to help pupils with a victim profile to better integrate.

It has to be available to everyone, the whole educational community is informed of its existence during initial meetings and it is the teachers who have to transfer this information to parents in the introductory tutorials. The first step is to protect the victim, whose safety must be secured, and then to take one of two paths: reparation or disciplinary. Only professionals will be informed, for greater discretion, and to this must be added an attitude of dialogue and listening.

The protocol for action in case of bullying has 4 phases and 10 steps:

Phase 1: Detection, communication and planifcation of the intervention

STEP 1: Communication and information to the school management team.

It can be started by any member of the educational community and is a document that will be visible to any member of the educational community. It can also be triggered by a request from the Education Inspectorate, the Educational Guidance Team in School Coexistence or when the Management Team becomes aware of any case of bullying.

STEP 2: Provisional protective and supervisory measures.

It is the Management Team that will choose the people responsible for monitoring the subject and making a plan (Annex II). The annex proposes measures such as changing the class or canteen timetable of the pupil concerned to avoid contact with the aggressors, designating other pupils and teachers to observe the pupil and offering him/her a safe place to go to.

STEP 3: Information gathering and decision making. YES/NO start of protocol.

It is the school management that will collect information from students, teachers and families of those involved in order to decide whether or not to initiate the protocol. In any case, if it is decided not to initiate the process, the management will take into account the previous collection of documents in case new information appears.

STEP 4: Constitution of the Assessment Team and planning of the intervention.

The team will be made up of one or two members of the management team, the student's tutor, a member of the Guidance Department and other professionals. This group will be listed in Annex III where the actions and agreements will also be recorded. These tasks are distributed in section B of Annex III (planning) and there is a maximum of 18 school days to collect information.

Phase 2: Information gathering process

STEP 5: Communication and summons to the families or legal guardians of the students involved.

The Assessment Team will receive good practice guidelines for carrying out interviews. The families of both the alleged aggressor and the alleged victim will be summoned.

STEP 6: Interviews with the students involved.

Stipulated interviews are conducted with the victim, the bully and the observers.

STEP 7: Collection of Systematic Observation.

Annex VI is used here, in which the indicators and the location of the event should be noted.

Phase 3: Analysis and decision-making

STEP 8: Situation analysis, assessment proposal and follow-up planning.

It is in the support document C1 that all the characteristics indicative of bullying are collected and it is necessary to mark whether they are sufficiently accredited or not. It may be that there is not enough data to consider a case as bullying, that there are behaviours ruining coexistence after which a behaviour contract would be signed by the aggressor and his/her representative, or a clear case of bullying in which the correction procedure would begin. It is at step 8 that educational measures are taken and only in the case that bullying is truly considered to exist.

STEP 9: Assessment of the situation and drafting of the Summary Report.

The management team will decide whether the protective measures should continue and what measures to take with the students involved. These measures will be communicated to the teaching team as well as to the families and there will be a record of them in the support document. Apart from this, a summary report (Annex VIII) will be drawn up and sent within a maximum period of 22 school days to the Education Inspectorate and to the Educational Guidance Team for School Bullying.

Phase 4: Follow-up and supervision

STEP 10: Collection of follow-up information (Annex IX).

The management team will establish a communication calendar for summoning the families of the students involved. In addition to collecting information on the bullied student on a weekly basis for at least the first month, a record will be made of the actions that have been carried out.

STEP 11: Assessment of the evolution of the situation (Annex X) This information will be given to the victim's tutor the following year.

Discussion

The main difference between the Finnish and the Spanish systems lies in the focus of attention, because while the Finnish system concentrates on the group and the observers, the Aragonese system focuses on the protection of the victim when bullying has already occurred. We could say that the Finnish one focuses on preventing bullying and the Aragonese one focuses on ways of proceeding when bullying has already occurred.

In general, the Aragonese's system is based entirely on an exhaustive and regulated procedure; and leaves the communication for possible management to the schools. Another debatable point in the Aragonese protocol is that it stipulates the "accompaniment of the pupil allegedly bullied by one or more trusted classmates for the time considered appropriate, their task will be to provide support to the pupil allegedly bullied and to communicate any incident to the teacher". As we can see, the method of taking action is completely opposite to the Finnish method on this point, as pupils are not taught the power they have in their hands to stop bullying but must be mere observers in order to report what has happened to an adult.

The KiVA method, on the other hand, is based on the idea that the teacher represents a very different type of authority to that of the pupils themselves, who are seen as equals, and the teacher's capacity to solve the conflict is much more limited than that of the pupils themselves. In the Spanish system, the students are expected to be the ones to ask for help, whereas in the KiVA method there is a team that is actively attentive to bullying events. It is true that in the Spanish system teachers are encouraged to identify and report incidents that may indicate that bullying is taking place but not in the same way as in the KiVa method.

Another substantial difference between the two systems is the access to both models, as the Spanish model is a public model accessible to any member of the educational community and it is standardised, while the Finnish model is private and each school must pay to use it, so that if a school does not include the KiVA method in its budget, students will never benefit from its practices.

From the comparison of the two we can conclude that one of the key factors in a prevention programme is that it should be public, as is the case of the Government of Aragon , that it should be generalised for a given region and structured in such a way that it can be consulted whenever necessary.

On the other hand, based on the causes of bullying, a programme that prioritises preventive group awareness of the intolerable practice of bullying can be one of the keys to its eradication and not only focus on the figures of victim and bully. Although both systems pay attention to all the figures, it seems that the KiVa method favours prevention rather than subsequent action, which would help to better control and manage peer violence in schools.

Both methods succeed in creating a team of trained professionals who are in charge of managing each of these situations with the aim of improving the educational environment and favouring a positive and respectful classroom atmosphere.

Final considerations

In recent years, there has been a trend towards the naturalisation of bullying, sometimes considering it to be a common and unavoidable occurrence, and which is therefore not adequately dealt with or managed. This has generated an implicit permission in the aggressor that motivated him/her to continue bullying. In the victim it has reinforced the inability to cope with the phenomenon and in the observers it has stimulated a normalisation of bullying practices. This naturalisation is especially promoted by adults, who state that bullying has always existed and is therefore a problem that is difficult to manage and eradicate.

On many occasions, teachers state that the causes are eminently personal, family-based or social, and therefore do not fall within their competence and so they do not feel obliged or able to intervene in such situations. Many teachers, lacking training or commitment, are afraid of the aggression that the aggressors could exhibit if they were to intervene in such a situation.

Bullying is a cultural phenomenon that must be treated as such. The school should be a place where all children learn to live together, although actions that ensure healthy relationships are not always developed.

The KiVA method promotes emotional education, which is one of the most useful ways of preventing problems of coexistence, trying to create a positive climate from the early years at school. For this reason, emotional education becomes an essential tool to alleviate relational problems between peers and interpersonal conflicts, something essential since these types of situations have a high component of underlying emotional conflict; "an efficient preventive intervention of bullying should include the emotional dimension"[12].

The KiVA programme works from prevention, instilling a series of emotional and personal tools that promote self-knowledge and empathy, assuming the power of those who play the role of bystanders in a case of bullying. By working on and promoting emotional education, we can acquire coping skills, make responsible decisions, and especially learn alternative skills to aggression, and also prevent and/or manage conflicts[13]. Prevention must be eminently practical (group dynamics, simulation games or role-playing), in order to favour the development of

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[12] R. Bisquerra, *Inteligencia emocional en educación*, Madrid, Síntesis 2015.

[13] M. M. Muñoz-Prieto, *Desarrollar la inteligencia emocional para prevenir el acoso escolar*, "Escuela Abierta" 2017, no 20.

emotional competences in students. In a turbulent world where bullying, physical and psychological violence is growing at an alarming rate, we need new tools, new environments, new resources, where self-knowledge, anger management, the promotion of empathy and, in short, the acquisition of civic and social skills reign.

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