

“Bullying in Ages 4-7; Teachers & School Environment’s Intervention in the Greek context”

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Abstract

This piece of research is a case study that investigates the intervention of teachers and the school’s environment as far as bullying is concerned. The children that were observed attend a multicultural school in Athens. A review of the current literature in Greece and in the United Kingdom formed the basis for the offered description and analysis of the phenomenon. This paper examines the essential definitions of bullying, victim and bully. Moreover, in this research a range of forms of bullying, reasons for and potential intervention strategies are presented.

Triangulation method was applied. Being more specific, a systematic observation of sixty three children from four to seven years old; an interview that contained twelve open-ended questions, divided in three categories, namely knowledge, intervention and teaching methods; and finally reasons that may justify any form of bullying. Six teachers who work in the same school that children attend were interviewed, in order to enlighten the findings of the observation.

This research was brought to a conclusive end with a proposal for school bullying intervention strategies. Nevertheless, these results offer a wide range of intervention strategies in order to protect children from acting as bullies and become victims.

Key terms: bullying, victim, bully

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Introduction

Over the past few decades, there has been expressed a lot of interest in society concerning the controversial issue of bullying and the way that this dysfunctional behavior affects children's well being. Being more analytical, the forms of bullying that have developed in a school environment and the intervention of teachers in the Early Years is a rather interesting topic to investigate.

There is an extent bibliography that concerns the forms of bullying that developed in a school community, but also in the society, as adults, especially in the United Kingdom. The first research was conducted by Dr. Dan Olweus, in 1973, who aimed to investigate the forms of bullying and since then lots of researches were published until today (O'Moore & Hillary, 1989; Vail 1999; Borg 1999; Miles, 2006).

Other interesting pieces of research that have been conducted during the past few years concerned the connection of bullying with gender (Wolke et al., 2000), as well as the frequency of bullying that takes place in primary and high schools (Borg, 1999; US Department of Education, 1999). It is obvious that during all these years bullying has been investigated in depth.

In the early years settings, however, it is perceived a comparative lack of research into bullying meaning the classification of the bully and the victims. It is possible that early years practitioners are using a different "dictionary" to inform and prevent children from bullying. Certainly, there is a wide range of documents that teachers have access to, in order to be informed about the policy or methods of prevention (Department for Education, 2010), additionally to the anti-bullying policy that each school may develop (Wandsworth Council, 2011). Nevertheless, in these documents there is only a brief mentioning of the word bullying. The question that arises is if the bullying as word in Greek context, specifically; and if the lack of researches on bullying in the early years is translated as an absence of any form of bullying at these ages.

This study's hypothesis is that the forms of bullying are linked to the intervention of the teachers and the school environment. Therefore, the aim of this study is to

investigate the relation of teachers' and school environment's intervention in combination with bullying in the early years settings and to investigate if there is any link between these variables.

Methodology

Any phenomenon, in order to be understood, requires an effort. As a result, a researcher can use a number of methods to investigate it. A scientific research demands an organized plan of procedure or a circumspectly while clearly planned and logically designed plan of action (Leedy, 1989). This leads to the result that the researcher uses a specific scientific approach and adopts a specific type of study. Additionally, s/he uses a given scientific method and technique, in order to direct his/her investigation.

In this study, a scheduled observation was used as a research methodology. The data that was collected from this procedure aimed to identify the frequency with which specific behaviours or types of behaviour occurred in the classroom and measure their duration. The scheduled observation would allow the study of the educational processes in the actual setting; it would provide more detailed and more precise evidence than any other data sources, and it would stimulate any change while verifying when the change occurred (Bryman, 2004).

The children were observed, through the scheduled observation, during their free play at lunch time and they were divided into four groups aged from four to seven years old, in a total number of sixty three children, which were in general equally divided in classrooms at the beginning of the school year. As the children were divided according to their age, the stratified random sample was the sample technique that was used. Each group was observed three times, during a period of three weeks for twenty minutes, once every week. A table was used, in order to observe any form of bullying that may occur (see Table 1). In this observation, there were different types of bullying noted and when any of these took place, the researcher checked it on the board.

The frequency of these actions was checked every time. This table contained five different forms of bullying and it was used twelve times. As a result, the researcher was using a separate table for each grade for three times, as there was a three weeks long observation. The categories that were chosen

for this table were the most common forms of bullying and the most usual place that can take action is the playground, based in research according to Roland (1990) and Siann et al. (1993).

Nature of Bullying	Never	One Time	Two Times	Three Times	More than three times
Being teased in an unpleasant way					
Being called hurtful names					
Being left out of things on purpose					
Being threatened with harm					
Being hit, kicked or pushed					

Table 1. Observation table

Nature of Bullying	Explanation
Being teased in an unpleasant way	A child is irritating another child either verbally or physically
Being called hurtful names	A child is offending a peer by judging his/her appearance, cultural background, skin color etc.
Being left out of things on purpose	A child or a group of children excludes another child, because of his/her look, his/her behavior etc.
Being threatened with harm	A child is exposed in hurt
Being hit, kicked or pushed	A child is physically harassed

Table 2. Explanation of the categories

An interview with the groups' teachers was also used in order to be compared with the findings. A tape-recorder was used, so that the interview report was more accurate than writing down notes. Through these interviews, teachers asked to answer questions that concerned the identification of bullying in a classroom, but also the way that s/he intervened, in order to prevent any form of bullying in the classroom. These interviews enhanced the research from

the point of view of an adult and the way that s/he perceived the forms of bullying at the age groups that were examined.

Results

For the description and the analysis of the data Microsoft World Excel and QSR NVivo 9 were used. The research that took place in the setting that children were observed came up with interesting results about the forms of bullying that can be appeared in a school; and the intervention that teachers and school's environment may have.

In the first part of this research, four groups of children participated aged from four to seven years old, in a total number of sixty three children, which were in general equally divided in classrooms at the beginning of the school year.

The summary of the results showed the frequency of repetition of the forms of bullying that were observed in all the groups of children. Being more analytical, through this research we aimed at finding out how frequently any nature of bullying was noticed. Consequently, with a scale that starts with "Never" and ends up to "More than three times", the results were the above: 50% (n=31) was "Never", 25% (n=15) was "One Time", 10% (n=6) was "Two Times", 10% (n=6) was "Three Times" and 5% (n=3) was "More than Three Times" (see Figure 1).

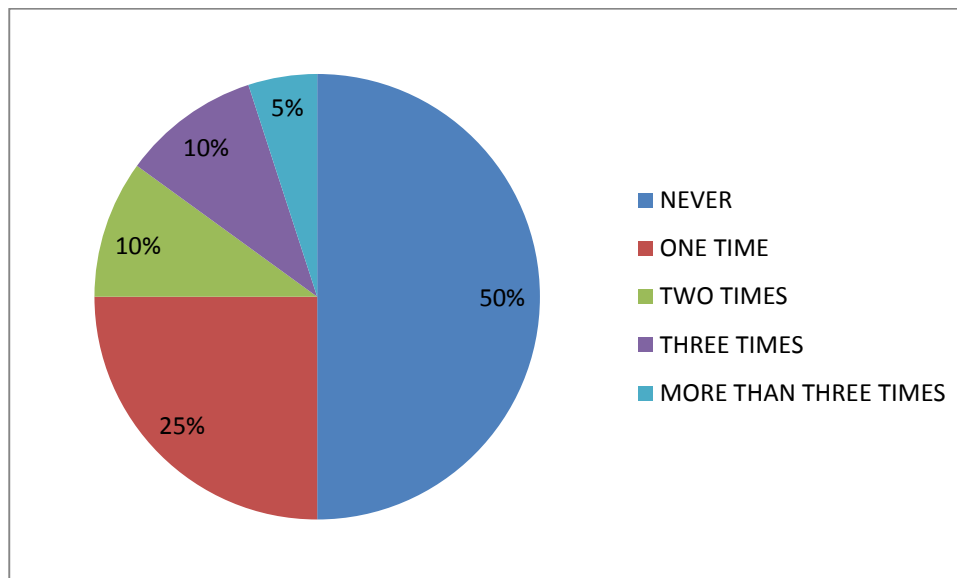


Figure 1 Frequency of forms of bullying

In the second part of the research, there were six teachers that were interviewed. All of them worked in the same setting that the research was

conducted and the average year of their working experience in education was fourteen years

The program that was used to summarize the answers of the participants is QSR NVivo 9. The questions of the interview's schedule were categorized in three groups: knowledge, intervention and teaching methods and reasons given about bullying. The first category had six questions. In a total amount the 87% (n=5) of the teachers presented a great knowledge as far as bullying is concerned. For example one question asked about the meaning of bullying (*"What does bullying mean to you?"*). All of the participants, 100% (n=6) of the teachers answered that bullying is linked to intimidation and violence that affects another person and it can be observed more than one time as a behavior. As Mr. 1 mentioned:

"repetition of force, physical violence or cohesion, through mentally making or psychologically convincing somebody to do something".

The second category contained four questions, in which 85% (n=5) of the teachers presented intervention strategies and teaching methods that apply in the classroom to avoid any forms of bullying. For example, one of the interview's question described three different cases and teachers were asked how they would react, in order to intervene (*"If there is an incident of bullying in your classroom, how would you intervene: a) in case of physical bullying; b) in case of emotional bullying; c) in case of psychological bullying?"*). The 100% (N=6) of the teachers declared that, in any case, they would intervene immediately and their first action would be to discuss both with the 'victim' and the 'bully', in order to measure the severity of the incident; and then they would inform the Headmaster of the school. A typical sample is that of Ms. 1, who declared that *"In all of these, I would intervene immediately. Firstly, I would talk to the "victim" and then to the "bully". I would explain to the "bully" the feelings of the victim and I would expect him/her to behave and to apologize."*

Finally, in the interview's schedule there were also two more questions, which did not belong to a specific category. In one question that concerned any form of bullying that teachers may ever encounter (*"Have you ever encountered any forms of bullying during your working experience among children?"*), 100% (n=6) of the teachers could recall an incident. As Ms. 2 described *"I remember very*

clear this incident. I was attending school and I was ten years old...This incident took place forty years ago and I still remember it very clear [...]”. The last question was asking for any anti-bullying policy the school may have (“*Are you aware of any policy against bullying at your workplace?*”) and 100% (n=6) of the teachers agreed that there is no such policy, as they is no need for that, due to the fact that “[...] there is no need, just to define what we believe bullying is at this school and what actions will be taken, if there is any form of bullying [...]”

Discussion

The forms of bulling in the early years settings is an area that it is not highly investigated in the current Greek literature. The aim of the present study was to investigate the interventions by teachers and the school’s environment as far as bullying or prevention of bullying was concerned in the age four to seven, in the Greek context. The frequency of any form of bullying at these ages was investigated, in a total number of four groups of sixty three children, aged from four to seven, who attended the same setting. Moreover, six teachers, who worked in the same setting with the groups of children, were interviewed, in order to investigate the level of their knowledge about bullying, the way their knowledge affects children’s behaviour and their intervention.

The three of the four weeks of placement, children were observed in groups, where there were selected five different types of behavior to be observed, in matter of repetition.

By the end of the scheduled observation, the investigation came up with the result that there are no forms of bullying in this particular school and the teachers needed to enlighten those results, in matter of reasoning these results. As far as the knowledge that the teachers had about the forms of bullying, the results were impressive. The majority of the participants were aware about all the forms of bullying, as they are classified by many researchers (Olweus, 1993; Ericson, 2001; Carney & Merrell, 2001; Smith et al. 2002). Summarizing the answers from all the questions that concerned the knowledge of teachers about bullying, all teachers involved were aware of bullying and the signs through which you can recognize if a child is a ‘victim’ of bullying (Olweus, 2009). It can be

argued that since it was a small group of children it is easy to prevent and control any forms of bullying.

In the category that concerns the intervention of the teachers, all teachers under consideration followed the same procedure. In any case, all the teachers would discuss with the victim and the bully; and they would try to find out the reasons for the incident (Glasner, 2010). As part of teachers' intervention was concerned, the teaching methods that they applied in the classrooms seem to play a pivotal role. By the end of the interviews, all teachers claimed that "[...] because of the role of the institution to promote anti-bullying...the role of each teacher is to model best to behave, to show children how to expect them to behave."

Through the interviews of the teachers, some interesting strategies were offered, in order to prevent the development of bullying. These strategies may apply to each case and they can be useful to any practitioner or other professionals who work with children, as long as the circumstances allow this. The phenomenon of bullying is contemporary and every professional who deals with children needs to be informed and be prepared to confront any such case.

Each research work is completed successfully, but in the same time there are some problems that need to deal with. As this paper is a case study, the results may not apply to all cases.

In conclusion, this case study came up with some interesting results. Despite the fact that, according to the current literature, there is a lack of investigation in the early years settings as far as the forms of bullying are concerned; this research showed that in a small school there are not developed severe incidents of bullying and the teachers are informed in a high level about the intervention strategies against bullying and they are able to prevent any of them, through discussion. As a result, it would be interesting to research the topic and find the differences that may exist between the young ages and the older children, but also the differences between a small school and a larger one.

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