

Using Incomplete Tales in Group Role-Playing to Educate Teachers against School Bullying

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Abstract

Bullying at schools is an issue of major importance with educational, social and psychological consequences. However, teachers' education on bullying is limited only in informing teachers about the characteristics of the victims, the bullies and the bystanders, giving instructions for the prevention and treatment of the phenomenon. This information is necessary for its understanding, but not sufficient for teachers who are supposed to implement experiential learning methods to students, without being aware of such methods. As a result, teachers often act intuitively, looking for magic recipes and sometimes they report that they are not able to do anything (Katsama, 2013). Experiential learning methods are applicable to teachers in order to be educated on bullying prevention and treatment. The purpose of this workshop, which is a part of a broader study for bullying prevention and treatment at schools, is to familiarize teachers with experiential learning methods, strengthening them, in order to be able to implement programs on bullying prevention and treatment. Twenty-four teachers ($N = 24$) from elementary and high schools participated in an organized workshop about bullying, after taking a course about bullying prevention and treatment. They formed five subgroups and played the roles of victims, bullies, bystanders. They listened to an uncompleted tale about bullying and each subgroup completed it by giving their own end. The participants cooperated and interacted expressing strong emotions, such as fear and anger. The usage of an uncompleted tale in a group role - playing activated mechanisms of identification and projection. The participants were identified with their own needs and emotions. The whole action cultivated empathy through stimulated experience (Polemi-Todoulou, 2010), dynamic interaction and expression, and signaled the understanding of the complexity of acts, forms of behavior and emotions (Moureli, 2010). Teachers need a more systematic education on bullying prevention and treatment via experiential learning methods. Experiential learning methods prepare them emotionally for the implementation of programs to cope with this phenomenon (Payne, 2000), mobilize the internal dialog on the development of interactive dialog on social issues and contribute to an effective understanding of the phenomenon of bullying.

Keywords: school bullying, group role- playing, tale, experiential learning method

1. Introduction

Nowadays the phenomenon of bullying and violence at school is of major importance issue with serious educational and social implications. Preventing and dealing with bullying requires the training of the entire educational community. Bullying is referred in bibliography as a *repeated, deliberate and unprovoked* harassment to a child, who finds difficulty to defend himself in front of a stronger (physically or socially) classmate, who deliberately wants to cause pain or inconvenience to the weak child.

Bullying also appears in the form of racially motivated verbal attacks intimidation (deception, discrimination, immoral comments) or in the form of social intimidation (rumors, destroying personal items, isolation from the group) or even as physical intimidation (impacts, nudges, kicks). It also appears in the form of electronic bullying (blackmail via Internet and e-mail, via messages on mobile phone, etc). Bullying occurs mainly in the school environment, in areas without supervision by teachers, such as the courtyard, the corridor and the class during the break.

The two most directly affected categories of pupils are the bullies and the victims, but the bystanders have also a more important role whose attitude and behavior affects bullying incidents.

All bullies know how to use their power, whether they are the "smart" perpetrators /bullies or the "not so smart" offenders or perpetrators /victims (Bogiatzoglou, Villi, Galani, 2012, p. 17). According to a research (see Olweus, 1993: 55), 35-40% of perpetrators who had demonstrated behavior of intimidation at school age, has been indicted for criminal acts in young age. Furthermore, 50% of these children develop as adults with antisocial behavior.

The victims feel fear, despair and appear trends of fugitive. The "easy" victims are hectic, unsafe, shy and isolated or cry when are being bullied (Vegianni, 2011: 24). They feel threatened, anxious, refuse to go to school and show symptoms of school fear. They can also be aggressive and nervous, while there are a few cases where the same children-victims may become bullies to other children or to their brothers at home (Rigby, 2008).

Bystanders play the most important role at the bullying development and have different roles. Some of the bystanders are close to the bullies and encourage bullying, while some others try not to draw the attention on them and hold more neutral stance. Although they seem to be neutral deep down, they cannot forgive the intimidation they feel from their behavior. They criticize and oppose to the intimidation or have the courage to give up the passive role of witness and defense the victim. Apart from them, they are those who deny their participation and responsibility on bullying (Sullivan, Cleary & Sullivan, 2004).

The role of teachers is also important to prevent this phenomenon. For this reason, all the prevention programs are aimed at the training of teachers to implement programs for the prevention and treatment of bulling. But often the training of teachers is limited to information on the issue, to the characteristics of the victims, the bullies and the observers and to certain instructions or to the application of rules in the classroom and at school. This information is undoubtedly necessary for the understanding of the phenomenon, but it is not sufficient for the teachers, who are responsible to implement programs with experiential learning methods for pupils without themselves have been "being trained" with such methods. For this reason often recruit personal experiences and act intuitively, looking for magic recipes or say that they don't feel able to do anything (Katsama, 2013).

Experiential learning is an alternative type of education that extend beyond theory (Triliva & Anagnostopoulou, 2008) and is addressed even to adults. Its aim is to bring the student in direct contact with the object learning, through research, field work, observation, interviews, role-playing games, etc. (Dedouli, 2002). According to Bakirtzis (2000), the teaching of experiential learning aims to the creation of an environment that provides the opportunity of experience which facilitates "*the internal processes of configuration of the mental world, of the personality and of the wishes, of needs, of incentives, of interests*". Therefore, the procedures and methods used in experiential learning, contribute to the process of understanding of ourselves (Kamarinou, 1998), and to the development of personality as a whole.

The experiential learning method seeks the active participation of learners in learning exploiting the feeling, the experience, the sharing, the interactive and the exchange of experience in the group. Most important is the problematic and the critical rethinking. It is a natural process which flows without any problem (Itin, 1999). It is considered important, because it strengthens the cognitive and emotional development and it is also considered as a method irreplaceable in the continuing adult education (Silberman, 2007; Andersen-Boud & Cohen, 2000; Luckne & Nadler, 1997).

The experiential learning proposes and applies certain specialized techniques, such as the production and use of audiovisual, experiential representations and games, techniques of different kind of Speech (calendar, telling stories, creative writing), activities of art creation, role playing game and theatre (Triliva, et al., 2008).

Role-playing game is often used both as approach to learning at children as well as at adults. Mostly the fairy tales and stories as pedagogic tool knowledge of personal development and as technique of problem-solving are usually addressed to children. Through the symbolism and the mechanisms of identification and viewing, tales negotiate issues that are seeking treatment and solution. Tales and Stories also contribute to the development of metaphorical way of communication which is very substantial, because they relate the words to the thoughts and emotions. Although the stories/fairy tales are used in adult education, it does not seem to be used in adults education as a method for the training of teachers for dealing matters of bulling.

For the best implement of prevention programs for the bullying by teachers it is necessary teachers themselves to be educated in such experiential learning methods. It has been repeatedly pointed out the need to deal with such matters through experiential methods, because in this way is being mobilized the whole person as he actively participates and is moved emotionally and express his views and his beliefs obtaining at the same time empathy.

2. Methodological Framework

2.1 Objectives

The purpose of this workshop, which is a part of a broader study for bullying prevention and treatment at schools, is to familiarize teachers with experiential learning methods and also to support and strengthen them in order to be able to implement programs on bullying prevention and treatment.

2.2 Participants

Twenty-four teachers with average age 37 years old (80% females, 20% males) from nursery, primary and high schools participated in an organized workshop about bullying after taking a course about bullying prevention and treatment. All these teachers were aware of this issue but they needed more targeted information on this matter. After the end of this course the participants have registered to participate (on a different day) in a workshop which would be used experiential learning methods. The title of workshop was: *Tell it with a story*.

The steps we followed in this experiential workshop were in accordance with the principles of adult education and with the basic principles of configuration of group (Todoulou, 2012). At first, we investigated their expectations. Then, participants heard an incomplete tale from one coordinator of the workshop and each teacher took a role that matches those of the heroes of the tale. Collectively, these roles were: (a) victim (Lina), (b) victim (Ieremias), (c) bullies (sharks and powerful fish) (d) bystanders (other fishes), (e) a teacher (lady cuttlefish).

Then participants are invited to register feelings of each role and then to write a letter addressed to other roles. After expressing emotions and the writing of the letter each group, present its feelings and read its letter. Each role listened carefully to all the other roles, the sharing of feelings and the letter. Each group discussed with other groups, while at the end they had to create five different groups (one from each role). The five new groups- in which there was one of all the roles - wrote a new letter and then discussed and completed the tale.

2.3 Instruments

A semi-completed tale titled "*The bullies of sea bottom*" (Alexandrou, 2011) was used as a tool for role-playing. The tale presented the life of a marine school in the society of fish, with typical hero-fish in roles of bullies-victim-observer and teacher.

3. Procedure and Results of the Workshop

3.1 Teachers' Expectations

The expectations of teachers in the vast majority (100 %) referred to the willing n to learn more about Bullying, and its impact on school performance and on the behavior of children. They also expressed the desire to keep them informed with current bibliographical references, while 80% of participants cited the acquaintance with experiential techniques which they will be able to implement in class in order to provoke effectively the interest of pupils. Finally, it is reported the issue of information on the role of education on the issue of bullying (40 %).

3.2 Role-Playing

Emotions. At this stage all participants (each role) had to write a letter to the others. Everyone heard the letter written by each role.

Recording the emotions of each role showed that all roles expressed as overwhelming feeling "**fear**" (100 %) and "**anger**" (100 %) for different reasons. The bullies said: "*I feel fear for not missing the power and the prestige I have now*". The victim reported: "*I feel fear because J am weak*". The Teacher said: "*feel fear not something dreadful happens or fear for happening something bad to someone*".

Anger is also expressed by all the roles with phrases such as: "*I feel anger because I fear that something will change*" or "**Anger** because no one face me up". The bully wanted to maintain this status since he has been gaining in power, but also wants to collide in order to pop up the size of his force. However, even the victims and the observers expressed anger because nothing happens to change this inconvenience. "*I am angry that nothing happens*". They expect others to act to change the situation. Both fear and anger are expressed either with tears from the victims and the teacher or by inaction by the observers, or by irritation from the bully.

3.3 Calendars (Diaries)

Calendar of victim (Jeremias-Lina): While initially was revealed the feeling of inability, the fear expressed by tears, the insecurity, the sensitivity to the deception, after the expression of emotions of each role, the victim (Lina) expressed the desire to do something bold to reverse the situation. The action is focused on motivating all to be unite and show interest. Characteristically reported: "*My strength is in my heart and not in the body*". The other victim (Jeremias) who was the main protagonist, felt shame and pity that could not help his little friend. He also felt anger and outrage for the bullies, accumulated indignation, frustration, sorrow and injustice. He also had feelings for revenge and pay back. He would like to change the situation, but did not dare to do that alone, that's why he asked for help from the others. He expressed the desire to be able to deal with the threat, to step up and hit the weak points of the gang. He finally said that he was coward and perhaps he would be better to opt for leaving and going somewhere else.

Calendar of bully. The bully who was not so terrible physically, was presented fearless and frightening, powerful because he managed to scare the creatures of the seabed. He was imperative and requested others to the feel fear of him because he was the leader. Weakness annoyed him and provoked all others using the joke as a weapon. In his diary revealed that he was being beaten when he was small, that's why now became great. He accused the teacher for doing nothing. He didn't care that he had no friends as long as he had power and maintained his prestige.

Calendar of bystanders. The bystanders finally expressed fear to react and admitted that they remained neutral because of fear. They also expressed the need to react and understood that they should be a shield, to show courage, determination and team spirit. Action is needed, trust to their forces and confidence that they succeed.

Calendar of cuttlefish (teacher). The teacher wanted to help her students, the little fish, but she did not know how. She understood that she needed to get closer the problem and show real interest. She worried, felt embarrassed that she did not have ready solutions and sometimes got angry with herself.

3.4 Interaction between the Roles

Both the expression of emotions and the reading of calendars but also the interaction among them was responsible of making "the changes" inside the participants. In all groups dominated the discussion. Nobody could have imagined the emotional situation of the other. Each role was in the shoes of other (empathy).

Bullies expressed the need to change his behavior, he acknowledged that something had changed inside him by listening to all the other roles, he wanted to belong to a group but he felt fear because he did not know how. The victims realized that it was time something to be done, to find strength to react. They have also realized that they were not alone, they had have allies and they felt stronger. They understood that the whole situation required love, interest and affection. There was still fear but at that time was expressed by interest for the bully. The teacher felt fear too, but realized that she should have found solutions directly. She did the self-criticism and she faced up her guilty. She understood that it was time to start a discussion, to gain the confidence, to create a safe climate in order to prevent. She also realized that such issues needed love, interest and understanding. Finally, the bystanders wanted to act as a safety net. They understood that all have the same needs and must act as a group, dispelling fears and proposing solutions.

3.5 Completing the Incomplete Story

Each group completed the tale giving its own end. The first group tried to get closer to the bully asking for his assistance in completing a construction citing his strength. This approach from the point of view of victims resulted in bringing together emotionally victim and bully. It showed "*the effort of victim to find something in common with the bully*". Initially this assistance offered by the bully to the victim confirmed his power, but on the other side also the bully had benefits. He learned to read and to feel safe.

The second group chose another end. This group suggested to the teacher to organize a school play performance titled: The Robin Hood of the seas" in which they all participate. The magical instrument (the book of the "Robin Hood of the seas" was the incentive for joint action of all fish.

The third group focused on the creation of an anti gang" with the participation of the observers who would have the aim not to revenge, but to step in at the common risk (the bully was caught in networks of a trawl and the small and weak fish contribute with their weak power to save the bully. In incident of risk of the bully, the victim intervene to save him).

The forth group focused on the coalition of victim-bully against any threat and risk of the society of the seabed through cooperation and solidarity.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to familiarize teachers with experiential learning methods and to strengthen them in order to be able to implement programs on bullying prevention and treatment.

Role-playing via a tale is proved to be a very dynamic experiential learning technique. Different voices of each role are detected, strong emotions and experiences are expressed underlying considerations with a view to understand the emotional status of each role. The phenomenon of school bullying was more clear as participants understood certain aspects of behavior (Polemi-Todoulou, 2010), developing a different understanding and empathy for roles relevant or not, desirable or undesirable.

The responses, as expressed through the calendars (diaries) and the observation of the critical friend, revealed that all the groups and roles expressed strong emotions, such as fear and anger. The first negative emotions (fear and anger) expressed by each role were converted to a search for ways to resolve the problem in action. The interaction between the groups revealed that all felt fear but through the process of group at the end seemed to feel more strengthened. It came to the fore that experience activated mechanisms of identification and viewing. Each group gave its own end in the story as through the roles these experiences laid the foundations for more effective understanding of this complex issue (bullying). Furthermore, each one's experience drove force to the expression of their own needs and emotions in a personal rethinking.

The completion of the incomplete story from each group revealed the mood of change, the need to strengthen the action, the attempt to understand the position of the other and to reverse the situation to more positive direction. In addition it was revealed a feeling of boldness and determination and the value of the group. The word "together" was dominant in most stories.

The rethinking of each group brought up understanding and satisfaction because they all felt more capable, better prepared and mentally stronger to deal with such matters. They considered that all kept many ideas and suggestions from this experiential procedure, as experience became very important. They also testified that they felt a "draining and filling simultaneously", as they touched several aspects, experienced something different, took part in roles, identified with others, expressed emitting several internal thoughts which otherwise would not have expressed. They found the change of roles and the interaction among them a very clever technique and they underlined that they were looking forward to implementing all these to their pupils.

Teachers need a systematic psycho pedagogic training using experiential learning approaches.

Tales as a tool through the role-playing game, as a method for the strengthening of teachers in dealing with bullying, mobilizes the internal dialog on the development of interactive dialog on personal and social issues.

The result of the whole action was the conquest of empathy through experience (Polemi-Todoulou, 2010), the dynamic interaction and the expression which marks the opening of understanding to the complexity of meanings, of acts, forms, behavior and emotions (Moureli, 2010).

The experiential learning is proved to be effective, active and constructive process, interesting and enjoyable because teachers are approaching the concerned issue highlighting the value of "voice".

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