Peer observers of bullying
How to act on bullying

Compañeros observadores del acoso escolar
Cómo actuar ante el acoso escolar

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1 INTRODUCTION:

"Bystanders in the face of bullying. What they can do according to their classmates", corresponds to a part of a research with a sample of students from a school of Compulsory Secondary Education in the city of Salamanca (Spain). It presents the explanations that students make when faced with bullying situations and the possible responses to reduce and prevent it.

Among the solutions proposed, we highlight those given to peers, i.e. classmates themselves, who are seen preferably as bystanders who have to make an effort to stop the bullying, isolate the aggressor, help, support, speak up and denounce it.

In order to carry out the proposed functions and other related ones, university training for teachers is very necessary, so that they in turn can favour pacifying processes in schools, where observers of bullying have to show a positive attitude towards their own classmates, whether they are victims or aggressors, with the intention of acting and preventing conflicts.

2 METHOD:

The method is based on a quasi-experimental study, with a non-equivalent control group. It involves two subgroups, one control and the other experimental, which are administered the MCCC Programme (Improvement of Coexistence and Conversation Competencies Programme) (De Castro-Hernández and González-Alonso, 2008) designed specifically for this purpose. Both groups of the sample

propose open responses as solutions to possible bullying, which teachers, families and classmates themselves, as bystanders to bullying, can take into account.

3 WHAT THEY CAN DO IN RESPONSE TO BULLYING:

70.9% of the sample indicate that when faced with bullying situations, as seen in Figure 1, "something has to be done by teachers, families and classmates", to try to fix the problem and provide solutions. We emphasise what can be done by the classmates themselves, the *peers*, as *observers* of the conflictive situations that occur, in whose hands lies the possibility of showing a positive attitude towards the victim and aggressor, which allows not only that the conflict does not increase, but also that other conflicts can be prevented (González-Alonso, et al., 2020).

Figure 1 Percentages of "solutions to fix bullying"
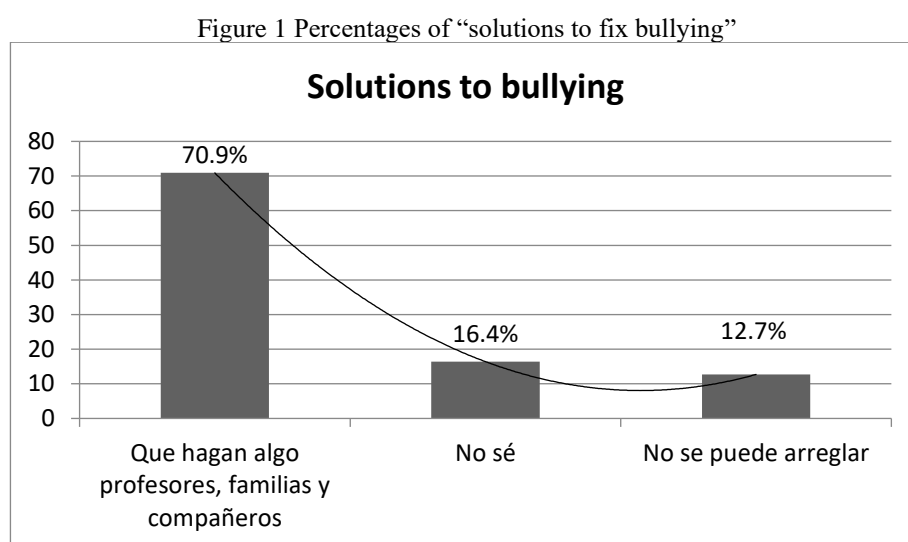
Meanwhile, 29.1% state that they "do not know" how to fix bullying, or directly that "it cannot be fixed".

In this sense, it is advisable to apply Galtung's (1998) "3Rs" process, carrying out an educational intervention on direct violence, with a process of reconstruction or *reparation*, followed by *reconciliation* based on the meeting of the parties to the conflict, addressing what underlies the conflict as a *resolution* of the conflict.

The application of the "3Rs" can be found in the solutions provided by teachers, families and peers. Reparation focuses on the intrusion into the damage done to people or things as a post-traumatic consequence to create a harmonious situation. Reconciliation seeks to close the open wound, bringing the necessary communication and dialogue to the meeting of the people involved so that the differences do not revert. Selfless cooperation or resolution is a fundamental condition for the closure and healing of the open wound after the conflict (Moreno, 2007).

4 PREFERABLY BYSTANDERS

In the question "*What do you consider yourself to be more of a victim, aggressor or bystander?*", the students in the sample chose between six alternatives: Less than half opted for "preferably bystander" (45.5%); 32.7% opted for "in favour of neither"; "preferably victim" 9.1%; "more victim and a little aggressor" 7.3%; "preferably aggressor" 3.6% and "more aggressor and a little victim" 1.8%. Then, in conflict situations, most of the students in the sample see themselves as *observers* or *bystanders*.

Figure 2 Percentages of "Are you more of a victim, aggressor or bystander?"

Are you more of a victim, aggressor or bystander?
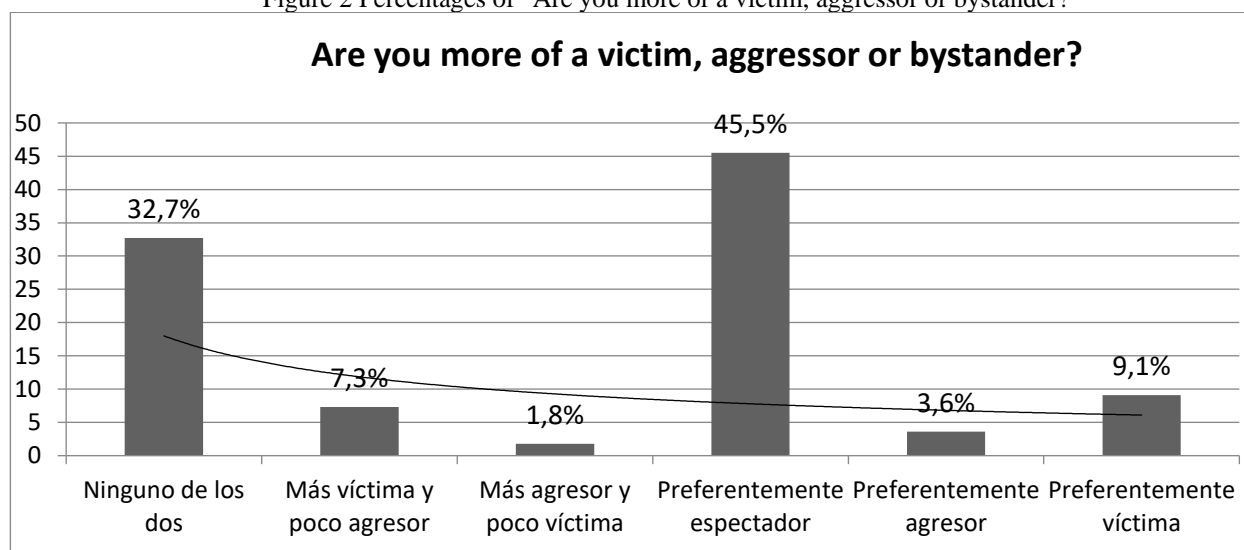
The formative interest of the spectator group in school conflicts is decisive in establishing preventive guidelines and education in values, as opposed to the positioning of the group forces and their interrelation in the face of the problem. Studies such as that of Sánchez and Cerezo (2011) already indicated this. The class group and its environment require special educational attention due to the direct influence they can exert in favour of one of the parties to the conflict, where they can reaffirm the aggressor forces or support the victim in his or her interest for justice.

The spectators are witnesses to what has happened and with their manifestations and expressions, they contribute to the aggressor's triumph, magnifying his attack and becoming *accomplices* through the supposed friendship that unites them and *helpers* through their collaboration. There are others *who ratify* the intimidations, because they see them and reinforce them; others are passive spectators, although they seem neutral and uncommitted, they keep quiet and let it happen, they tolerate and allow it to happen. The attitude against the instigator, the interest and support for the victim, make the bystander a *defender* and *re-educator*, as his or her attitude is fundamental and shows who he or she is with and how he or she contributes to achieving group peace and those who do not have a *defined* role in the process (Salmivalli, 1999, pp. 453-454).

"For peer observers, it represents a passive and complacent attitude to injustice and a misguided modelling of personal worth. It also shows a clear lack of solidarity" (Fernandez, 1998, p. 57).

A clear example of working with peer *observers* is the *KiVa Programme* in Finland, where the important role taken by the group of spectators is the key to reducing and preventing bullying. We have to take good reference from this programme because of the excellent results they transmit.

The training of bystanders enters directly into the training of future teachers. University higher education will especially consider the preventive and didactic contents that they will incorporate into the university curriculum to guarantee their training (González, Camacho and Gómez (2016). Other previous studies have already focused on the influence of dominance and/or submission behaviours in the workplace and their consequences (Smith, 1997) and on coordination practices in socio-educational spaces in order to take an interest in and warn of provocations and arbitrariness among young people (Randall, 1996).

The training of spectators as school students can form part of related programmes such as the *peer support systems* (Fernández, F. J., & Cowie, H., 2006) that respond to school conflict through the improvement of coexistence in positive behavioural models; the *Students League of Friends* (Muñoz, et al., 2007) training in the social and socioemotional skills of students; the *Peer Helpers* programme (Del Barrio, 2015), which seeks the emotional wellbeing of students.

Peer *mediation training* programmes cannot be left out, as mediators can be peers who, in a neutral, confidential and voluntary manner, promote dialogue, help to clarify events and channel agreements with the peers involved in the conflict (González-Alonso & De Castro-Hernández, 2019).

In the formation of peer-to-peer programmes, according to Torrego (2012), it is necessary to highlight, for example, the functions to be fulfilled, the values to be shown, the phases for helping, the people or team involved in the project, the limits and risks of the help, the specific training of the assisting students, the implementation of the project, etc.

Consequently, it is just as necessary for teachers to train groups of spectators of school conflicts in specific peace and coexistence programmes as any other system for the prevention or peaceful resolution of conflicts.

4.1   STOPPING SCHOOL BULLYING

The pupils themselves, as can be seen in table 1, ask their classmates, teachers or adults to stop bullying at school, putting themselves in "the place of the person being bullied", "stopping situations, confrontations, fights", "not allowing it", "telling the teachers", "trying to stop it from happening, at least in front of them".

Table 1 "Stopping bullying" as a solution to what peers can do

No.	What peers can do: "stop bullying"
1	Put yourself in the place of the person who is being bullied
2	Stop it, make them talk to him/her in a normal way
3	Stop the fighting
4	Stop the fighting or bullying and tell the teachers about it
5	Do not allow these things
6	Stop these situations when you see them
7	When you see bullying stop it
8	Try not to let it happen, at least in front of them, stop the bully

When detecting organised bullying carried out and assessed in the school, it requires awareness of what is happening, where it is happening, who are the protagonists, what is the motive and what role do bystanders and adults present or directly involved in the process of pacification play. Considering peers as an active part of ending bullying is an important delegation and co-responsibility, which needs to be applied among *peers*.

4.2 SAYING NO TO THE AGGRESSOR

"Saying no to the aggressor" is the variable (table 2) that brings together explanations given by the students in the sample as a solution to bullying at school. In this sense, they suggest "never join in with bullies", "do not humour them or play along with them, as what they do is not fun", "do not encourage bullying by laughing", "do not support bullies" and "stop people from picking on their classmates".

Table 2 "Isolating the bully" as a solution to what peers can do about bullying

No.	What peers can do: "say no to the bully"
9	Never join in with bullies
10	Do not humour them or play along with them. What they do is not funny
11	Do not encourage bullying by laughing
12	Do not support bullies
13	Stop people from picking on their classmates

To say no to the aggressor is to deny and really stand up against his psychological blackmail, knowing that group self-management can lead to conflictual or unpleasant situations, as long as the aggressor is not aware and self-critical of what has happened.

The threats and controls that the aggressor may pronounce after acting against the victim can be of this type:

- If you support me, I will not harass you.
- You have seen what I have done, now do not try to avoid it.
- You have seen how useless he is, he deserves everything he gets.

- He cannot even defend himself, he does not deserve to live.

- You know I am right, the victim will always be a loser.

- If you support him, you too will be a loser.

(Sullivan at al., 2005, p. 116).

In any case, bullying, which is more frequent in the first year of secondary school, verbally and between girls (Litago, et al., 2020), requires the unity of the group of observers and the support of adults, whether teachers, tutors, counsellors, principals or parents, is essential to close the circle of abuse, based on reflection and awareness of what happened with the application of a classroom programme for coexistence, peer support, reparation, reconciliation and resolution, school mediation, the tutoring plan, the application of the rules of organisation, operation and coexistence of the educational centre or any other action provided for in this document or in the coexistence plan. All of this will depend on the degree of the offence committed and the application of the same according to the aforementioned regulations and plans of the school.

4.3 HELPING, TALKING AND REPORTING

The variable "help and support" (see table 3) gathers open explanations from the students themselves to solve bullying such as: "Try to help each other and become friends", "help those who need it", "help the bullied", "help peers and don't pick on them", "tell a teacher or adult", "defend the bullied", "fix things without telling others, unless it is not solved", "support the peer who has been bullied".

Table 3 "Helping" as a solution to what peers can do about bullying

No.	What peers can do: "help"
14	Try to help each other and become friends
15	They should put envy aside and mind their own business. They should help those in need
16	Help the bullied
17	Help your classmates and don't pick on them
18	Tell a teacher or adult
23	Defend the battered
24	Defend the bullied
25	Fix things without telling others, unless it is not solved
26	Support the peer who has been bullied

Finally, to stop aggression or bullying (see table 4) between peers is to talk about it and discuss it as a practical way. Reporting these situations is another way of communicating what has been seen and heard in an attempt to find a solution to the problem. Thus, in particular, they indicate: "talk to the bullies

and the bullied", "talk to them and convince them that it is wrong", "talk to peers", "tell a teacher to stop the situation" and "report these situations".

Table 4 "Talking and reporting" as a solution to what peers can do about bullying

No.	Explanation of what peers can do: "talking and reporting"
19	Talk to the bullies and the bullied
20	Talk to them and convince them that it is wrong
21	Talk to peers
22	Tell a teacher to stop the situation
27	Avoid and report these situations
28	Report the situation

Talking, having a dialogue, telling someone, is part of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. With the application of these skills, as well as improving communicative competence, it helps us to solve conflict situations that arise, for example, in the school environment. We have learned that in order to live together we have to communicate, and if we do so correctly and appropriately, we can put an end to the bullying that has arisen.

Language is essentially oral, as Hernando (2003) confirms, saying that we learn to speak before we learn to write, that thinking is oral and that dialogue is the platform for communication between people.

Prado (2004) points out some speaking skills, so that the message transmitted is effective: thinking about what is going to be said, elaborating and organising ideas well according to the situation and the style in which it is going to be done. In short, it is a question of deciding on the circumstance, the content of the message and the intention sought.

Therefore, if the context is bullying or harassment in the classroom or its environment, the content is the explanation of what has happened and the intention is to seek help, guidance and denunciation of the event in order to seek resolution and peace, the procedure is perfectly valid and justified. It has to do with what students ask for in these cases: "talk, convince them, dialogue with classmates, tell an adult and denounce these situations. It is a responsibility to speak up and report what has happened, so it must be done properly in order to have the desired effect.

5 CONCLUSIONS:

In addition to peers, families and teachers also put forward a common way of solving it: talking about it, not keeping quiet and having a dialogue. The idea is reinforced that a message said in time helps, convinces, encourages and supports, much more than a punishment or sanction. The aim is to close the wound opened by the conflict with a positive solution, rather than a punitive or sanctioning one.

Students need to communicate in any conflict situation that may arise. The help and support that is so much in demand needs to be thought out, elaborated and organised, where the values of honesty, friendship and self-esteem are fostered to overcome conflicts and promote a positive communication climate (Bernárdez-Gómez, et al., 2020).

The *KiVa Programme* in Finland is a necessary reference for restructuring the training work with groups of bystanders to bullying due to the known good results.

Teachers need adequate training from the University, to gather methodologies, strategies and resources to prevent and deal with bullying, to train bystanders and to educate in the necessary human values.

The appropriate use of communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) must be encouraged, knowing that the fact of speaking and communicating is given an important specific weight, as a vehicle for the transmission of the message, in the specific situation and purpose.

The training of groups of student spectators in school conflicts is essential to be carried out by the corresponding University directed towards future teachers, and these in turn, carrying out the multiplying work later in schools and institutes, through specific programmes of pacification and conflict resolution.

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