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## **Classroom Management and Bullying – A Recent Phenomenon of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools**

### **Abstract**

*When discussing about classroom management, we no longer tend to consider it as a simple technical issue of the schooling system. On the contrary, classroom management is treated as a basic component of schooling and the teaching process. Since school is intended to provide students with the basic desired learning outcomes, then classroom management should not be viewed as an end in itself but as a means for creating and maintaining a learning environment that is optimal in achieving the intended curricular goals.*

*Recognizing that classroom management is a fundamental support for the learning and teaching process, while on the other side bullying in schools has begun to receive serious attention, it is to be admitted that little is known about the relationship between classroom management and bullying in the classroom.*

*The process of exploring this kind of relationship between the two, goes through a detailed investigation among classroom management techniques, students' behavior, physical environment, social factors, teachers' methods and practices etc. The paper intends to find the answer to some questions regarding bullying in our schools. How much is the bullying phenomenon spread in Albanian schools? What are some of the reasons that lead to bullying troubles among students themselves, as well as students and teachers? What strategies do teachers apply to deal with the bullying phenomenon? Under what circumstances is bullying more likely to occur in the school environment?*

*Therefore through this paper by exploring the relationship between bullying and classroom management, by providing an answer to the above questions and discovering the techniques teachers implement to reduce it, we would be able to find out how much bullying interferes in classroom management issues, and how we can solve it. This would undoubtedly offer some help for the teachers in treating with the bullying phenomenon in their teaching practices, in order to achieve well managed classrooms.*

**Key words:** classroom management, bullying, phenomenon, strategies, practices

## 1-Introduction

The art of teaching can be a struggling endeavor not only for novice teachers but also for the professional and experienced ones. It is undoubtedly one of the professions that requires great skills in responding to students' needs in today's society. In recent years school systems are going through important reforms when it comes to the improvement of students' academic achievements. However, there is a list of problems that demand important consideration such as managing the classroom environment and treating bullying, a recent phenomenon in our schools. Bullying has always existed but little attention has been paid to it during the years, when it comes to the impact it has on classroom management and teaching process.

Classroom management is a challenge that many educators constantly face, but when intermingled with bullying phenomenon the situation becomes deteriorated. Teachers need to answer critical questions of whether they are fully prepared or qualified in addressing classroom discipline. (Classroom Management:A California Resource Guide, 2000) Classroom management is an issue that has received little attention in the recent years since more and more focus is paid on students' academic and knowledge perception success. Nevertheless, since bullying interferes and distorts classroom climate, we can not pretend to achieve success on students' results. Nowadays more and more new teachers find themselves unprepared when it comes to mastering management skills, and they are unprepared when it comes to managing behaviour problems in the classroom, directly connected to bullying. This lack of ability in managing misbehaviours and bullying phenomenon has often obliged many teachers in reaching the decision of quitting their profession.

Therefore the need for successful classroom management skills and management of classroom or school misbehaviours has not diminished in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, on the contrary it has put the spotlight on these two related issues which are crucial for the success of the teaching process. Only by providing a positive environment can teachers teach and students learn.

A simple perspective of classroom management would primarily view it as classroom discipline, classroom physical organization and management of students' misbehaviours. However, it goes further than that, it includes teacher's actions in dealing with these behavioural

interventions, avoiding bullying phenomenon as much as possible, and in establishing a positive learning environment, bully-free classroom climate, which would support productive learning.

So the purpose of this paper is not merely distinguishing and identifying bullying phenomenon in our 9<sup>th</sup> grade system, but the paper also aims at finding out strategies and techniques teachers apply in these schools in order to reduce the phenomenon, create a pleasant and well managed classroom where teaching and learning occur naturally.

## 2-Historical background

### 2.1-What is Bullying? What does it consist of?

In different books we can find different definitions on bullying such as:

- “Bullying includes teasing, harassment, and intimidation. Bullying among boys involves themes of intimidation, power, domination, control and humiliation. Bullying among girls involves themes of social cruelty, deception, character assassination and hurt feelings.” (Classroom Management: A California Resource Guide, 2000)
- “Bullying is a subjective experience that can take many forms” (Robinson,G. andMaines, B. 2008)
- “Bullying is commonly defined as repeated aggressive behavior in which there is an imbalance of power or strength between the two parties.”(Rimerson J. Sh.)
- “Bullying is defined as physical, emotional, or verbal abuse by one or more students intended to intimidate or torment a particular child.” ( Flicker S. Eileen and Hoffman J. Andron, 2006 )

This list of definitions would be endless when consulting a variety of books, but the core remains the same, that is bullying is teasing or physically and emotionally abusing, hurting somebody intentionally; it encompasses an *aggressive behavior* with the intention of hurting someone. Since aggressive behaviours are an inseparable part of classroom management, then bullying issue needs high consider-

ations when it comes to this topic. Bullying is not a recent problem, although it has only recently been paid much attention. In fact Olweus (Sanders E. Cheryl, Phye D. Gary, 2004 ) , considered as the pioneer of the field, was the first scientist to focus on the topic and contribute scientific data regarding this issue. If we ask our parents and grandparents they would tell us stories on bullying or being bullied in their school years. Just like nowadays they might have experienced, or even participated in teasing, pushing, threatening behaviors in their class, in the playground, in the school hall etc. Kids have teased each-others for generations. For many years people believed that bullying was a crucial part of growing up, often making the general statement “Kids will be kids”. (Murphy G. Alexa, Murphy M. Madonna, Banas L. Sharon, 2009)

If kids were fighting they were often left to sort it out by themselves, as a good way of learning how to survive in the tough world of the school yard or classrooms. However, people’s attitudes on bullying have changed a lot in the recent years, taking it more seriously. Parents’ have come to realize that bullying is not the right path in children’s life, on the contrary they have become more and more convinced that the more bullying is tolerated the more unsafe the society becomes and the less productive teaching is in the classroom.

Bullying can occur in the classroom, in the school yard, in the school toilets, on the way to school and home, in the school corridors etc. However, for the purpose of this study we are going to focus more on *bullying in the classroom* and its impact in classroom management and classroom academic success.

## **2.1-What are some of the types of bullying?**

There are many different forms of aggressive or harmful behaviors between people who learn, play, work or live together and not all of them fall in the category of bullying. Some are conflicts, some of them are random aggression, however all should be taken seriously especially in the classroom or school atmosphere. Managing our social relationships is a difficult skill, for many of us it is otherwise considered as a lifelong learning opportunity. Children go to kindergarten and then to school too young to manage the complex processes of sharing, taking turns and socializing.

Out of these endless learning experiences, some soon learn that dominance works and in many walks of life it is often rewarded and admired by humans. (Robinson, G. and Maines, B. 2008). Friendships are strengthened by the formation of groups, teams, clubs and these organizations often define themselves by exclusion, that is setting barriers to who they accept in their groups.

It is not important identifying who belongs in these groups, it is more significant to identify who does not belong. Combining in this way the leading dominance, and the nature of group process, it is easy to see how bullying begins by identifying a target who is excluded and harmed by a range of behaviors, among peers, classmates, friends in the street etc.

So bullies are ordinary, dominant and often quite popular people who behave in a way that is intended to cause harm in order to establish high status in every environment.

Bullying can be of three different types. When people think of bullying, they usually think of a child or group of children teasing, pushing or even hitting another child. This kind of bullying is known as **direct** bullying. (Murphy G. Alexa, Murphy M. Madonna, Banas L. Sharon, 2009) Direct bullying can be verbal such as name-calling, insulting, teasing or threatening; or it can be physical such as pushing, hitting or any other form of hurting someone.

Another type of bullying, the second one is indirect bullying which is less visible but as painful to the victim as the first one. Indirect bullying is also known as **relational or social bullying**. (Murphy G. Alexa, Murphy M. Madonna, Banas L. Sharon, 2009) It includes social actions such as purposely excluding someone from a group or spreading rumors about someone intentionally, especially common among girls.

The third kind of bullying is **cyberbullying** (Shariff, Shaheen.2008) mainly evident in the last decades emerging from the development of technology.

Cyberbullying is when an individual is harassed, humiliated, threatened or tormented by people using the internet and other interactive technologies such as the cell phone. It includes sending multiple insulting or threatening messages or emails, to a person's email ad-

dress or cell phone, creating a page for humiliating a person and sharing someone secrets on a board. Cyberbullying is a powerful form of bullying since it reaches hundreds of people as a short period of time, and of course it can be done anonymously by every person, similarly to what is often happening nowadays with the various social networks.

### **2.3 Who bullies more boys or girls?**

There exists a common myth about bullying, according to which bullying occurs only among boys and not girls. However, this is not true, since both boys and girls bully in their school or classroom environment. Boys tend to use direct forms of bullying, meanwhile girls have the tendency to use indirect forms of bullying among each-others. So in general boys are more likely to get engaged in physical bullying than girls, however girls on the other side tend to use more relational aggression that is relational bullying. (Espelage L. Dorothy, Swearer M. Susan, 2004)

Furthermore bullying by girls might be even more hurtful than that of boys. Girls differently from boys, tend to harass within a tight network of friends, making their damage to victims even more intense and harder to identify. Girls often use exclusion, rumors, name calling, manipulation etc to cause psychological pain. Girls fight with body language and not with fists, and knives. ( Flicker S. Eileen and Hoffman J. Andron, 2006 )

What is to be emphasized is that girls' bullying is more cruel and destructive, with effects felt psychologically for years beyond those of school.

#### **1. Methodology and results**

In writing this paper a questionnaire was conducted to pupils of 9<sup>th</sup> grade school in order to find an answer to the questions mentioned in the abstract, regarding bullying phenomenon. The study was focused only on the children of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade school and not in secondary school which could cover another entire study due to the teenage problems of this age. The survey, having this target group at focus, aims at finding out where and when bullying happens most often, if it happens more between girls or boys, what strategies teach-

ers apply to deal with it etc. Two schools were chosen to conduct the survey: “Sul Misiri” and “Jorgji Dilo” 9<sup>th</sup> grade school. There were delivered 10 questionnaires per class, each questionnaire consists of 10 questions, the results of which will be analyzed below. The questionnaires were completed by the students from the third grade up to the ninth grade, since first and second grade pupils of elementary school are not mainly characterized by bullying actions in their classes due to their age. This methodology in writing this paper was selected for two basic reasons: firstly it was easy to be conducted in practical terms (delivering and gathering surveys), secondly since the survey was completed by the pupils, the purpose was to collect as much information as possible, beyond teachers’ opinions. The interpretation of all the data collected, serves as a rich source of unexplored information, through which teachers can efficiently achieve well managed classrooms despite bullying troubles.

**The questionnaire consists of the following ten questions (the original one was also accompanied by the alternatives to be ticked or completed by the students):**

The pupils interviewed included boys and girls of two age groups; the first one belonging to pupils from 6-9 years old and the second one included pupils from 10 -12 years old. Nearly 80 % of all the questioned pupils had experienced the bullying phenomenon. Some of them only once or twice and others still did, even at the moment of completing the questionnaire.

Most of the surveyed pupils admitted that bullying happened mainly in two school environments, the classroom and the playground.

*\* (The questionnaire was downloaded at [archive.teachfind.com/ttv/static.teachers.../Bullying%20questionnaire.pdf](http://archive.teachfind.com/ttv/static.teachers.../Bullying%20questionnaire.pdf), downloaded on 23.03.2015)*

The classroom was considered a bullying environment not only during the 5-minute-breaks, when the teacher was not there but even during the 45 minutes of lesson. The most common forms of bullying experienced were calling names, throwing folded papers during the lesson with offensive words, excluding from a group (mainly found between girls) etc. Meanwhile in the playground if girls bullied by excluding or offending their friends, boys on the other side used push-



ing physically sometimes even seriously hurting each others, why not even doing this deliberately while playing together.

What the questionnaire highlighted, especially among pupils from 10-12 years old pupils was the spread of cyberbullying, a quite recent phenomenon, not only in their mobile phones, but even in the social network, facebook. Also, during the teaching process pupils admitted texting and cyberbullying their friends without paying attention to what the teacher is explaining. Another kind of bullying experienced was that because of race, especially in one of the schools "Sul Misiri" which is surrounded by a gipsy community living there; as well as bullying caused by religion. Some of the children whose families belonged to the Muslim religion were bullied by others, by offending their family members for their particular clothing characteristics and their frequent attendance of Muslim rituals in the mosque.

Since this paper is focused on bullying and its impact on classroom management, it is necessary to concentrate on the impact it has on classroom atmosphere and the teaching process. Calling names during the lesson, offending pupils during the teaching process, as well as outside it, using cell phones as a means of bullying classmates, excluding friends from certain groups of friends all influence students psychologically and emotionally making them lose their motivation for the lesson, sometimes causing conflicts within the 45 minutes of teaching. The situation can become even worse by forcing pupils to drop out of school. Bullying is often the primary cause of aggressive behaviors in the classroom, forcing teachers unwillingly to pay more attention to fixing disruptive behaviors rather than focusing on the academic success of the students. Several teachers, including foreign language teachers too claim that in many cases they spend their teaching time dealing with bullying troubles, rather than dealing with homework, lesson activities and explanation.

In many schools, there is no anti-bullying policy preventing this phenomenon. However, many teachers try to use different strategies to avoid it.

Some of them try to discuss in advance with their pupils at the beginning of each school year the *bullying phenomenon*, in order to prohibit any unpleasant events in the classroom. Other teachers use the extra curricular hours to introduce bullying topics. Meanwhile another possible strategy applied by teachers is talking to bullies' parents,



or talking to bullies themselves about the aggressive behaviors they reflect versus their peers. The same thing should also be applied to the pupils being bullied, in order to calm them and reduce as much as possible the psychological bullying impact it might have on them, even in the following years of their adulthood.

## 2. **Conclusion**

Bullying in schools is not a recent phenomenon, but only recently has it started to be included widely in contemporary literature, and treated seriously for its impact on pupils and the classroom management or school environment. Researchers and educators all over the world have started not only to address bullying in their researches but they have also attempted to understand the concept of bullying by providing cross national studies, treating it in much more details. Teachers on the other side, try to do their best by identifying bullying situations, and treating them carefully based on their classroom circumstances.

However, despite the recent increase in the amount of research addressing bullying, much more remains to be discovered and understood regarding assessment and measurement of bullying in our schools in Albania, both 9<sup>th</sup> grade schools and secondary ones, as well as how to create and apply successful prevention or intervening programs improving in this way the quality of the teaching process by achieving an efficient classroom management.

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