

THE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY FACING BULLYING

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ABSTRACT

This is a report of the practical activities of an extension project carried out in a State Elementary School in Manaus (AM), aiming to problematize with teachers the theme of bullying in the school context. Four workshops were developed: (1) Identifying the concept of bullying in everyday school life; (2) What academic research has said about bullying?; (3) How to combat the dynamics of bullying in a school context?; (4) Collectively building actions to fight bullying. The main results found were: (a) actions to confront violence aimed mainly at the subjects involved in the situation; (b) close relationship between bullying and prejudice; (c) judicialization of the educational process; and, (d) collective action as a critical practice for dealing with bullying. Therefore, we conclude that the school psychologist must discuss and enable the debate about bullying and its forms of intervention in the school environment.

Keywords: school psychology; bullying; teachers; elementary school

Los desafíos y las estrategias de la Psicología Escolar en el enfrentamiento del *bullying*

RESUMEN

Este es un relato de las actividades prácticas de un proyecto extensionista realizado en una escuela Estadual de Enseñanza Básica en Manaus (AM), teniendo como objetivo problematizar con los profesores la temática del *bullying* en el contexto escolar. Se desarrollaron cuatro talleres: (1) Identificando la concepción de *bullying* en el cotidiano escolar; (2) ¿Lo qué las investigaciones académicas han dicho sobre el *bullying*?; (3) ¿Cómo hacer frente a la dinámica del *bullying* en contexto escolar?; (4) Construyendo colectivamente acciones de enfrentamiento al *bullying*. Los principales resultados encontrados fueron: (a) acciones de enfrentamiento a la violencia dirigidas, principalmente, a los sujetos involucrados en la situación; (b) relación estrecha entre *bullying* y prejuicio; (c) judicialización del proceso educativo; y, (d) acción colectiva como práctica crítica para el enfrentamiento del *bullying*. Delante de eso, se concluye que el psicólogo escolar debe problematizar y posibilitar el debate sobre el *bullying* y sus formas de intervención en el espacio educativo.

Palabras clave: psicología escolar; *bullying*; profesores; enseñanza básica

Os desafios e as estratégias da psicologia escolar no enfrentamento do *bullying*

RESUMO

Este é um relato das atividades práticas de um projeto extensionista realizado em uma escola Estadual de Ensino Fundamental em Manaus (AM), tendo como objetivo problematizar com os professores a temática do *bullying* no contexto escolar. Foram desenvolvidas quatro oficinas: (1) Identificando a concepção de *bullying* no cotidiano escolar; (2) O que as pesquisas acadêmicas têm falado sobre o *bullying*?; (3) Como combater a dinâmica do *bullying* em contexto escolar?; (4) Construindo coletivamente ações de enfrentamento ao *bullying*. Os principais resultados encontrados foram: (a) ações de enfrentamento à violência dirigidas, principalmente, aos sujeitos envolvidos na situação; (b) relação estreita entre *bullying* e preconceito; (c) judicialização do processo educativo; e, (d) ação coletiva como prática crítica para o enfrentamento do *bullying*. Diante disso, concluímos que o psicólogo escolar deve problematizar e possibilitar o debate sobre o *bullying* e suas formas de intervenção no espaço escolar.

Palavras-chave: psicologia escolar; *bullying*; professores; ensino fundamental

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INTRODUCTION

Currently, one of the forms of violence discussed with greatest emphasis in the media and in school life is bullying. Several studies have been carried out on this topic, which ended up popularizing this term, although there are still many doubts about the true meaning of this word. According to Braga and Lisboa (2014), due to the fact that it does not have a direct translation in the Portuguese language, the term has been commonly used to refer to “abuse between peers” and “intimidation”, which reduces the complexity of the phenomenon.

The first research on school bullying began in Sweden in the 1970s, and various studies on the subject have portrayed this construct with three main characteristics: (a) intentional harassment with the objective of causing physical or psychological damage, (b) repetitive attitude and (c) unequal power relationship (Oliveira-Menegotto, Pasini, & Levandowski, 2013). But this understanding of the phenomenon has been questioned by many researchers. For Francisco and Libório (2013) and Francisco and Coimbra (2015), this simplistic understanding - of an individualistic character, based on the blaming and victimization of those involved in the process - has caused mistakes in the ways of confronting bullying in the school context. According to these authors, any and all manifestations of violence in the school context have often been understood as bullying, and this is something of concern because other forms of violence, such as homophobia, misogyny and racism among others, have been reduced to this concept.

It is true that we can find some research interested in analyzing the causes of bullying based on social, economic and particular factors but these analyses have, for the most part, occurred in a fragmented way. The researchers Crochík et al. (2014) alert us to the fact that bullying has been commonly understood as a specific problem, depending on the school and / or the family and / or the individual, without recognizing the link between the social, institutional and individual totality. For the authors, we are committed to understanding school bullying as a reflection of structured social relationships in society.

In this way, it is not possible to state that the cause is only social and not individual, since they are interconnected. In view of the attempt to sensitize the school to the need for critical and contextualized practices of confronting bullying, a university extension action was planned in a State *Ensino Fundamental II* in Manaus, with students ranging in age from 11-15. Its objective was to work with teachers to problematize the theme of bullying in the school context.

ACTION PROPOSAL FOR THE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

The team extension had pedagogy and psychology

students and psychology professionals. The activities in the school were developed of workshops, once a week, lasting an average of two hours and with the participation of eight teachers.

The workshops were guided by the interactive-dialogical principle, according to which, horizontal dialogue and the joint construction of practices, occupy a central place. For Freire (1987) the world, while human, historical and cultural, is built by dialogic intercommunication. In that perspective, that all subjects have the right to communicate and to be recognized as masters of their voice. That is why developing our workshops by listening to teachers was essential for the recognition of their voices, their positions and the way of intervention to be worked on together with the extension team. In this way, at the school, four workshops were organized based on the following themes: Workshop 1: Identifying the concept of bullying in school life; Workshop 2: What does academic research say about bullying?; Workshop 3: How to combat the dynamics of bullying in a school context?; Workshop 4: Collectively building actions to fight bullying.

The workshops

Workshop 1: Identifying the concept of bullying in school life

This workshop aimed to present the project and listen to the demands and opinions of teachers about bullying. For this, we organized a conversation circle that was guided by some central questions: (a) Are you interested in talking about bullying? (b) What are the reasons that drive you to be interested or not in this topic? (c) What interventions are there to confront situations of bullying in the school context?

In general, the professionals were enthusiastic in critically talking about the subject due to the lack of training focused on the proposed theme. Considering the dialogical principle, the extension team and educators began to problematize the dynamics of bullying and exposed everyday scenes that served as an aid to dialogue and understanding how the school's actions and perceptions have been dealing with this phenomenon.

Based on a story shared by a teacher and the acceptance of her argument by some educators, we were able to verify the concept of violence: “The problem is that today everything becomes a matter of discussion, this is normal, who was never called a whale, or skinny, at school? I had a nickname but this didn't traumatize me”.

The shared stories helped the team to problematize constant and repetitive persecutions, linking them to prejudice, as well as helping on the impact of trivialization and the naturalization of violent behaviors

at school. Although there was awareness of the need for debate around the issue that involved violence, especially bullying, it was still common to face the unworthiness and invisibility of the phenomenon, when the cases were identified at school as commonplace or as just what children do.

A teacher shared her strategy, explaining that she uses punitive actions and, when necessary, seeks judicial and police bodies to contain violent acts:

No, they don't do that to me, there are rules in my class, and whoever doesn't comply is out. I tell them: if they want to study, I'm here and if they don't want to, I have several ex-students who are police chiefs and police officers and I will tell them to arrest everyone.

When directing punitive actions at perpetrators of violence, the teachers believed that the problem would be solved. This type of conception of confronting violence directed at the subjects involved in violent acts has supported the argument of the entrance of the police and the judiciary in schools, calling them to attend situations that could be mediated by pedagogical actions aimed at strengthening respectful social relationships within the school context. In view of this, researchers Albino and Terêncio (2012) demand a change to the perspective of the punitive scenario and consider precipitating the action of delegating to the judiciary - which has state strength - an intervening action in an attempt to rescue elementary concepts of life in society.

Workshop 2: What does academic research say about bullying?

In this workshop, the main objective was to share with teachers academic studies and research from specialists in the areas involved with the theme of bullying. For this, we promoted an activity based on the reading we have done of the works of Antunes and Zuin (2008) and Francisco and Libório (2013), in which they explain the close relationship between bullying and prejudice from a dialectical logic, which simultaneously differentiates and associates them.

To carry out this activity, we placed several images related to the theme on the table. We asked teachers to identify images that were configured as bullying and / or prejudice. In this activity, it was very clear the difficulty in classifying the situations illustrated in the images as one or the other phenomenon, which provided an opportunity for the discussion about the social construction of prejudice and its implication in the phenomenon of bullying. This activity with educators generated the following question: would there be bullying in a society in which there was no prejudice?

Researchers Francisco and Libório (2013) have mobilized in their work a reflection on the individualistic, prejudiced, classist and sexist practices prevalent in our

society that triggers the occurrence and maintenance of bullying in schools. It is evident that there is a very close relationship between the bullying and prejudice. For this reason, we need to equip teachers with knowledge based on academic research and specialists from the areas that involve this topic from a psychosocial perspective.

Workshop 3: How to combat the dynamics of bullying in a school context?

The purpose of this workshop was to discuss with the group ways of confronting by talking about situations that occur in school life and considering the following question: how do we deal with bullying? Therefore, first, the teachers were presented with several pictures related to the experience of bullying. Spontaneously, the teachers chose an image and thought of a way of confronting the situations illustrated. The confronting actions proposed by the teachers were guided by dialogue, respect for others and differences, and, in judicial examples, as a way of referring to cases considered "extreme".

Through the proposals presented, we lead the group to two questions: (a) Does judicialization solve bullying problems in the school context? (b) Is the law sufficient to solve problems arising in school? There was unanimity on the part of the teachers in emphasizing that law and justice are the only alternatives to solving school conflicts, mainly attributing responsibility of mediating school conflicts to the police. One teacher emphasized that, "the presence of the police inside the school would solve half of the problems of bullying and violence, the students would be afraid and intimidated".

In view of this reality, what we call the judicialization of the educational process has been established in schools. According to Chrispino and Chrispino (2008), this is characterized by the action of Justice in the educational context, that is, it is the judicial expansion in school territory, intervening in situations that emerge from the school and result in several attempts to regulate student life and the behaviors considered "deviant".

In general, this meeting was very important, as teachers realized that breaking with this practice of judicializing education can mean an attempt to rescue authority and autonomy lost by them, the main actors in the educational process.

Workshop 4: Collectively building actions to fight bullying

This activity we explained that the final proposal of the extension project was the realization of a collective action that problematized the dynamics of bullying involving the school community.

Thus, together, it was agreed that each teacher and a member of the extension team would be responsible

for developing the activity in the classroom. This activity had three basic procedures: (1) introducing the concept of bullying; (2) dialogue about scenes of bullying at school; and (3) think collectively about ways to face bullying.

At first, the teacher stimulated reflections on bullying and after answering the students' initial concerns, they were asked to divide into small groups to begin the second stage of the activity.

In these small groups, they received a balloon filled with an illustrative image that could refer to bullying situations at school. When the balloon burst, the groups shared the image and collectively thought about ways of confronting. After this demonstration, the group designed posters containing reflections, suggestions and challenges that arise in situations of bullying. These posters were put up around the school, allowing all students and teachers to have access to what was produced in the classrooms.

This workshop corroborates the proposal suggested by the research by Crochík et al. (2014), that recommends activities in the school context aimed at understanding the phenomenon of bullying, including the whole school and not just those involved in this form of violence.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the experiences learned through this project, in the face of violent episodes - seen as commonplace and unimportant - we observed in the educators' initial comments a position that was sometimes permissive, sometimes strict. This controversial duality of actions reveals that the ignorance of the phenomenon makes the school a vulnerable space for the appearance and maintenance of bullying. It is a fact, however, that the practice of such a phenomenon must not go unnoticed by education professionals. Schools, according to Francisco and Coimbra (2015), should function as spaces for the protection and emancipation of students' lives. They need to share knowledge that breaks with the stereotypes that support prejudiced relationships and with the naturalization of situations of violence that can contribute to intolerance and persecution among peers.

Because it is a psychosocial phenomenon, it is a fact that confronting bullying is not limited to actions

developed only in schools, but, according to Francisco and Coimbra (2015), if the school recognizes the dynamics of violence in its different manifestations and believes that this dynamic can be changed, it will contribute essentially and strongly to the transformation of social relations in our society.

Finally, we argue that the school psychologist can and should problematize this phenomenon with the entire school community, involving students, educators and family, as well as developing actions in schools about the ineffectiveness of blaming subjects as the only ones responsible for bullying episodes.

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