Forestalling Bullying

Harassment among minors can be considered as a certain type of habituation to violent domains of interaction, a psychosocial illness caused by a lack of exposure to sensitive sociocultural democratic environments. It is therefore necessary to build a citizenship engaged to education (Global Citizenship Education), as bullying prevention, in addition to other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Bullying is discussed referring to degrading actions, recurring and prolonged, exerted by minors on an equal. Physical or virtual assaults and insults, rejections or intimidations that hinder the victim's school activity and cause the victim to feel continually threatened are examples of bullying and cyberbullying, which have serious repercussions, not only on the emotional well-being and academic performance but also on physical and mental health. The solutions must involve families and teachers, particularly in the context of regulated education where participation can be promoted in a more planned and controlled way. Expert approaches insist on the relevance of the school in forestalling aggressions and discriminations, with critical and reflective attitudes towards the violence that surrounds those situations, teaching students to refuse them ab initio as inadequate.

Keywords: Bullying, School Harassment, Global Citizen Education, Sustainable Development Goals, Prevention.

Introduction

Although harassment among minors can be studied paying attention to each act or specific case, we can also consider it as a certain type of “climate” (climate of opinion). In this sense, experts speak of violence as a psychosocial illness that is generated in the habituation to violent environments, caused by a lack of democratic consciousness. However, it is necessary to be aware that “whoever verbally assaults, does not have to go beyond the barrier of physical injury. Frequently, however, those who physically attack also do so verbally” (Saneleuterio & López-García-Torres, 2017, p. 268, translation). Psychological abuse, instead, presents greater subtleties precisely because they are not usually accompanied by verbal abuse or physical aggression. For this reason, psychological abuse is not usually measured as precisely as direct violence, much less in school settings, such as those tacked herein.

First, the aggressor and the victim must be clearly defined. For the study of the casuistry and prevention in childhood, we can agree that both must be minors, which would leave aside cases of aggression where the age is very unequal and shows a factor of dominance or evident power. In this regard, it must be considered that, as Prats (2015) has established, bullying by peers, especially in the school environment “leaves more consequences than abuse by adults”, probably because it is more difficult to assume, since it cannot be related to an excess of authority.

Focusing consequently on peer problems, a study by Cerezo (2009) showed that, when the distribution is seen according to sex, violent behaviour during the first years of school occurs more frequently among boys than among girls. Although the data is not particularly striking, it is striking to find that
both types of violence (boy-boy and girl-girl) are dominant with respect to those that occur between the sexes; these are rare in childhood, increasing with puberty and adolescence, and specializing in sexual or sexist violence. However, if we extend to harassing behaviours without violence, these stereotypes are nuanced. Globally, the latest UNESCO report (2018) advances that the prevalence of bullying is not significantly higher, in general, in one sex than in the other. The difference would come in its typology, and for this reason it is necessary to investigate it in order to adapt prevention measures that act precisely at the origins of the problems, according to their nature.

Sustainable Development Goals, Global Citizenship and Bullying

As indicated in the Guía didáctica. Conecta con los ODS, by the Generalitat Valenciana, 2019, globalization has a positive side, which allows us to connect and interact with other people around the world. But globalization is also making exclusion more visible: hunger, poverty, inequalities, the violation of Human Rights in many parts of the planet, the depletion of natural resources, forced migrations that produce problems integration...

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development1, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests (United Nations, 2019).

Those sustainable goals are shown in Figure 1:

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1 See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld
The implementation of the SDGs or #Global Goals is necessary to empower women and the youth to live in a world in which all people can thrive as global citizens. But, how can citizenship be formed with a sense of belonging to a world community of equals, committed to the problems caused by inequalities? Once again, education seems to be the answer, according to the Guía didáctica. Building this citizenship, having global awareness, and at the same time being actively engaged in transformative local action, is what has been called Global Citizenship Education, and it draws upon experience from other education processes, including human rights education, peace education, education or sustainable development, and education for international and intercultural understanding. It does not have a formal status, since it is not a predefined subject or school subject. Global Citizenship Education evolves from the pedagogical tradition of Education for Development (promoted by specialized NGOs in international development cooperation since 1980), and expands its horizon incorporating in a comprehensive manner various content related to education for peace, education in values, education for gender equality, environmental education, education for health, education for sustainable consumption...

Figure 2 shows the learning objectives for Global Citizenship Education developed by UNESCO (2015, p. 29, as cited in Eis & Moulin-Doos, p. 55) are:
The goal of global citizenship education is to empower students to participate and take active roles both locally and globally, to confront and resolve global challenges, and ultimately to be proactive in their contribution to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. Thus, it is about incorporating 3 dimensions of learning (UNESCO, 2016):

1. The cognitive dimension concerns the knowledge and understanding of local, national and global issues and the interdependence and interconnectedness of different countries and populations.
2. The socio-emotional dimension involves learning to develop attitudes of empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity.
3. The behavioral dimension focuses on developing skills for effective collaboration and decision-making.

The goal of global citizenship education is to empower learners to engage and assume active roles both locally and globally to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. Global citizenship education has three conceptual dimensions. The cognitive dimension concerns the
learners’ acquisition of knowledge, understanding and critical thinking. The socio-emotional dimension relates to the learners’ sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity. The behavioural dimension expects the learners to act responsibly at local, national, and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world.

As *Guía didáctica* states (p. 12), to address the cognitive dimension of Education for Global Citizenship is necessary to work in the classroom, accessing and analysing other sources of information, aimed at facilitating the understanding of the relationships that exist between life in our contexts and the lives of people from other parts of the world, to develop critical and resolutive thinking in students. However, to address the socio-emotional and behavioural dimensions, pedagogy must be complemented by a more holistic approach, so information and knowledge can be combined with practice and direct experience. This methodological approach should provide students with experiences and opportunities to develop, contrast and build their own views, values and attitudes to understand how to take actions responsibly. Participating in community activities, taking advantage of cultural diversity in the classroom and in the close community, confronting different points of view… are some of the key pedagogical components for progress towards critical citizenship, according to this guide.

According to UNESCO (2019, foreword), “Addressing school violence and bullying is essential in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and SDG 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies”. And it continues:

To ensure safe and inclusive learning environments, UNESCO advocates a comprehensive school health approach that encompasses policy and systems, skills-based health education, safe learning environments and links to health services. National education sectors must adopt and implement measures to prevent and address violence and discrimination, both because of their impact on education, health and well-being, and because they stop children and young people from achieving their potential. To advocate for safe and accessible learning environments for all, UNESCO advocates a comprehensive approach to school health that includes policies and systems, as well as competency-based education, safe environments, learning opportunities and links to health services. National education sectors must adopt and apply measures to prevent and address violence and discrimination, not only because of their impact on education, health and well-being, but also because they prevent children and young people they can make the most of their potential (“What UNESCO does…”).

UNESCO’s work in school violence and bullying is divided into four main areas:
To provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive global evidence on school violence and bullying.

To support the development of effective policies to prevent and address school violence and bullying, including school-related gender-based violence.

To improve the measurement of violence and bullying within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To strengthen national responses to school violence and bullying, particularly education sector responses.

The actions are diverse, and include, among others, the declaration of the first Thursday of November of every year as the International Day against Violence and Bullying at School Including Cyberbullying, recognizing that school-related violence in all its forms is an infringement of children and adolescents’ rights to education and to health and well-being. It has also been published, during the World Education Forum in 2019, Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying, containing the most recent and complete data on issues related to violence and bullying, a publication which presents the most up to date and comprehensive evidence on the school violence and bullying, analysing global and regional prevalence and trends, the nature and impact, and successful national responses. it analyses its incidence and trends at the global and regional levels, its nature and impact, as well as the different successful responses at the national level.

The Concept of Bullying and Its Prevalence at School

One of the first authors to address the issue of aggression among schoolchildren, on behalf of the Norwegian government, was Dan Olweus, who called the aggressor “bully” (Olweus, 1978). The concept of “bullying” has to do with the recurring and prolonged in time degrading actions that, in a school, a boy, a girl or a group exert on an equal. According to Olweus (1978), apart from physical assaults and insults, rejections or intimidations that hinder the victim’s school activity and cause the victim to feel continually threatened are also included. As we have already shown in López-García-Torres and Saneleuterio (2015), bullying is determined by the compulsory relationship between schoolchildren, or at least their difficult evasion, by sharing a classroom or patio daily:

Thus, it is in the school where the subject has the least ability to choose, since the possibilities are limited—and forced—to those enrolled in each grade. In other words, there are fewer friends to choose from and, if there are undesirables, a greater probability of finding them, given that they share the same square meters for many hours a week (p. 419, translation).
Indeed, people will feel more harassed by others in a relationship inversely proportional to the possibilities that they have to avoid interacting, as it happens in the school or at work. Apart from these two areas linked to limited contexts, the most widespread aspect of harassment would be sexual, which can occur within or outside of these contexts.

For the Anglo-Saxon concept of stalking or harassment, the patrimonial equivalent “acoso” has been taken in Spanish. The term “acoso” comes from the old Spanish “cosso” (career); “acosar/ to harass” means “to make somebody run” and, in other meaning of the Dictionary of the Spanish language, “to persecute, without giving truce or rest” or “insistently urge someone with discomfort or requirements” (RAE, 2014). These actions constitute a crime according to the penal code. Thus, according to the glossary of De la Encarnación (2015),

there is harassment when watching, persecuting, or seeking physical closeness; establishing or attempting to establish contact with a person through any means of communication, or through third parties; misusing their personal data, purchasing products or merchandise, or contract services, or having third parties contacting that person; infringing their freedom or their assets, or against the freedom or assets of another person close to them (pp. 448, translation).

According to the Ley Orgánica/Organic Law 1/2015, of March 30, which modifies Organic Law 10/1995, of November 23, of the Penal Code, in Spain harassment is classified as a crime punishable by penalties of three months to two years in prison, among others.

Bullying is among its most common typologies, so much so that it even has its own international name: bullying, similar to mobbing, which is used for harassing in the work domain, although the latter term was first used to describe certain behaviours of the animal world. The fact that these anglicisms are widespread in the studies and literature of the Hispanic tradition shows their widespread social incidence.

The student who begins to have relations of arrogance and excessive dominance, especially if this is accompanied by someone who accepts the submission, is activating an indicator that problems of violence or school abuse will surely appear. The rigid dominance-submission scheme is characterized by one person dominating and another being dominated, one is controlling while another is controlled, one exercises abusive power and the other must submit. It is a relationship of arrogance that ends up turning the abuser into a bully or intimidator who can present overt violent behaviours—physical or verbal—, but also violent relational behaviours such as spreading rumours or excluding the victim from a group (Povedano et al., 2015).

UNESCO (2018) released updated data about the world panorama regarding bullying and school violence; in this report there are generalized improvements related to the anti-bullying proposals and plans that have been implemented during the recent years in different countries (Álvarez, 2016; Félix et al., 2008; Hidalgo, 2015; Kärnä et al., 2013; López-García- Torres &
All in all, UNESCO (2018) maintains the warning that these situations have serious repercussions, not only on the well-being and academic performance of those who suffer them, but also on their physical and mental health. Indeed, these types of victims are more susceptible to future mental health problems, especially anxiety, but also depression, a tendency to self-harm or to have suicidal thoughts. Rosario Ortega, vice-president of the International Observatory on School Violence, explains that suffering bullying “supposes an imbalance and wear on the subject’s personality in a very strong way” (Prats, 2015, translation). Its consequences are exponentially aggravated if it is prolonged in time, since it ends up destroying in the victim “extremely relevant factors of the subject’s personality” (Prats, 2015, translation), insofar as it involves physical, psychological or both types of damage, which causes the humiliation of being considered a stupid person, weak and social outcast. The self-esteem is devalued, and the self-image deteriorates, which increasingly isolates the victim and ends up affecting very seriously their academic performance, although the latter is especially evident among men.

The differences between abused men and women are shown in numerous empirical studies, and in the abovementioned UNESCO report (2018). According to Romito and Grassi (2007), male victims would be more likely to fall into alcohol, while women would suffer more frequent panic attacks. The profile of the bully is more frequently identified among boys, therefore pointing to the sex variable (UNESCO, 2018). Other variables of risk include the fact that there are few academically brilliant students (Gage et al., 2005), whereas other statistics from some countries indicate that a large majority or 80% of gifted boys and girls have been attacked or bullied at school.

Now, as Ortega (1998) explained and we mentioned in Saneleuterio and López-García-Torres (2017), to some extent people who are cruel and unjustifiably aggressive should also be considered victims of the process, in addition to those who are the object of their cruelty and violence. And, thirdly, victims are also those who, without having become involved as agents, unintentionally fall into the observer role without deciding to intervene and end up living in social spaces soaked in violence. This last group, mostly neglected by the least evidence of their suffering, harbours potential abusive people who have become accustomed to this type of environment: living in continuous fear and normalizing these behaviours, they may even develop, conversely, a weak profile as future victims.

In the first sense, although with much less weight, many television series undermine sensitivity, especially the more realistic and closer they are to the viewer. Real or fictitious, the indirect effect of getting used to certain attitudes leads to perceiving a subsequent normalization of abusive practices—first in the mind—and then in the elevation of the threshold of what aggression is and what is not, what is admissible and what is not, etc.
Identification and Forestalling

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework of School Violence and Bullying (UNESCO, 2019, p. 11)

School violence includes physical, psychological and sexual violence, with different manifestations, as Figure 3 shows. This publication addresses bullying and the different types of bullying—physical, psychological and sexual—as a separate issue, being bullying the most common form of school violence.

Starting from other classifications of school violence (Grado & Uruñuela, 2017), we propose a double characterization, according to the effect, that is, whether psychological, verbal, physical or a combination of these abuses occurs, and according to the motivation, that it may be due to personal (physical, psychological, sexual orientation or identity) or collective factors (ethnicity, religion, belonging to a social group, etc.).

Among the behaviours, we find several that must have the characteristics of intent, recurrence and persistence over time to be considered “bullying”: social exclusion and marginalization, verbal aggression, humiliation and vexation, indirect or direct physical aggression, intimidation, threats or blackmail, among others. In other words, a specific attack due to a disagreement or offense that may have occurred would not be a harassing behaviour. The victim could be anyone, but in cases of harassment the identity of the victim is decisive, and, in addition, it presents an additional characteristic: defenceslessness, since the victim presents less power, whether on a physical, psychological or social level.
In effect, the person subject to harassment is usually a single student, who, in this way, diminishes the real possibilities of defending himself/herself or achieving synergy with another victim, especially if we consider the collective or group component and the silencing on the part of passive observers who, as silent witnesses, know the situation, but do not contribute sufficiently to the end of the attack. As a result, and a symptom of the perpetuation of the problem, the entire process is invisible to external agents who would be the ones who could act.

It is worth highlighting, within the different types of bullying and its manifestations, what experts have called cyberbullying, where the aggressor uses electronic means that transcend the school context. This conduct is defined as harassment between equals in the environment of information and communication technologies (ICT) and includes acts of blackmail, harassment and insults towards a student, which may or may not have sexual content. Being virtual, aggressors usually protects themselves with anonymity, and cases have been reported where an adult person was behind the screen. When we are dealing with sexual content recurrently sent to minors through digital media by paedophiles who hide their identity in order to gain their trust, a phenomenon called grooming in English, we are dealing with a case of very different procedures and effects, not at all comparable to the psychological effects of bullying or cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying also involves dissemination of harmful or defamatory information about the victim in a technological format. Also, sometimes these practices are combined with direct physical or verbal ones. School cyberbullying is a phenomenon of great relevance—and concern—due to its prevalence, the severity of its consequences and the difficulties it presents for its prevention and approach. Cyberbullying can consist of “sending emails to someone who does not want to receive more, threatening, sending malware, humiliating others, distributing tricked photos, creating defamatory websites or impersonating their identity”, as described in the Ciberbullying. Prevenir y actuar/Cyberbullying guide. Prevent and act, edited by the Official College of Psychologists of Madrid (Luengo, 2014, translation).

Bearing in mind the general characteristics of bullying, the following nuances are added to cyberbullying: first and most striking IS that the intention to cause harm does not always occur in the early stages of the process; second, that the repetition also occurs in virtual messages or actions, which are frequent and lasting over time; thirdly, the fact that there is usually previous contact or relationship between those involved in the physical world; fourth, that it is not always linked to situations of harassment in the physical environment and, if they are, they usually precede virtual attacks; finally, and as a defining condition, the attacks materialize through ICT media: SMS, WhatsApp, email, mobile phones, social networks, blogs, forums, chat rooms, etc.

According to the Information Society Area of the European Commission, this practice among adolescents and, together with the grooming phenomenon, is “the greatest problem currently evident among the set of detestable or risky behaviors” (Luengo, 2014, p. 115, translation). It is particularly interesting that,
although bullying in general seems to be declining, cases of cyberbullying are increasing (UNESCO, 2018), which forces to rethink prevention strategies and reinforce media education.

For this reason, educational centres that design and apply prevention and action protocols are increasing in cases of bullying and cyberbullying, as well as for those behaviours that alter coexistence in a serious and repeated way: insults, threats, assaults, fights, vandalism, child abuse and gender violence, whether these situations occur within the school or outside the school domain, provided they are motivated or directly related to school life.

These practices are consistent with research on bullying, as more and more studies are trying to discover the different influences of educators. Podestá (2019), for example, conceptualizes the roles of teachers in five metaphors: the spectator, the gardener, the judge, the bridge and the ally. Their descriptions help to show the limitations and strengths of each way of acting and, above all, the perverse effects that they can cause in the behaviours that are intended to be reduced. Along the same line of thought, Ruiz-Hernández et al. (2019) have also recently studied parental styles and their relationship with violent manifestations in adolescents. These researchers found that what is not advisable is the authoritarian style, coercive practices, physical punishment or the imposing character. In addition, through the analysis of 17 studies, they showed that the dimensions of affection, communication and promotion of autonomy guarantee positive behaviours, as De Vicente Abad (2017) already partially showed.

Thus, we see that in the triangulation of the solution we must involve families and teachers, this particularly in the context of regulated education where other more cautious solutions may be recommended. Indeed, all expert approaches insist on the relevance of the school in the prevention and detection of violence and discrimination, for example, through “serious and effective programs framed in a preventive pedagogy” (Aroca, Ros & Varela, 2016, p. 27, translation). For this reason, today educational centres are supporting the explicit promotion of the so-called “culture of peace” (cultura de la paz) (Sánchez Fernández, 2017) or the “good treatment” (buen trato) (Pastor Fasquelle & Cruz Velasco, 2017; Sanz Ramón, 2017).

The promotion of “good treatment” in classrooms must consider that the main reasons for bullying among children and adolescents fall into two areas. On the one hand, that of the physical appearance: being overweight focuses on the distance from beauty standards, lack of hygiene or general neglect, especially if they are accompanied by a weak or easily dominated character; these attitudes merit vigilance. On the other hand, and as long as leadership skills do not converge, bullying is directed to people who question the sex-gender system with their clothing, hairstyle or gestures (De Stéfano et al., 2015). The prevention of violent behaviour must, therefore, see them as inescapable strategic points in teacher training (De Botton et al., 2012; Santos et al., 2012).

The democratic decision-making, the pre-eminence of peaceful forms in conflict resolution, and facing social tensions using dialogue and negotiation,
are essential measures for the prevention of school violence. It is necessary to educate in respect and harmonious coexistence, aimed at avoiding the generation of personalities who foster a profile of aggressors and victims. Furthermore, in the specific case of sexual abuse and discrimination based on sex, in order to build a future society free of machismo, it is necessary to believe in co-education (López-García-Torres & Saneleuterio, 2016).

Conclusion

Teaching must compensate conceptually and attitudinally for manifestations of cruelty among equals and all behaviour that promotes lack of solidarity and exclusion among students. It must be emphasized that these are detestable behaviours, which do not have any justification, highlighting through real examples the consequences that these dynamics entail for aggressors, victims and spectators of violence (Ortega, 1998). In general, it will become clear that aggression is never an effective action to manoeuvre any situation or achieve goals.

In general, to favour the suppression of this trend, it is important to promote in schools a critical and reflective attitude towards the violence that surrounds them, teaching them to reject it in any of its manifestations. The intervention that is programmed to prevent or address the problems of violence between equals in the educational centres should not be directed exclusively to the victims, but also to the aggressors and the spectators; remember that everyone is involved and for everyone it has negative consequences.

All institutions, but especially schools and institutes, which are the cradle of personal training, must implement an educational policy of zero tolerance towards any type of violence. To guarantee this, the educational project of the centre has the obligation to collect the values, objectives and priorities for action, incorporating them into the curricular specification to avoid forgetting or improvising the transversal treatment of education in values of equality. Effective actions promote involvement by engaging the educational community in the elaboration, control of compliance and evaluation of the rules of coexistence of the centre, being equally important the participation of both teachers and students in the specific rules for each classroom. In this line, teachers promoting a good climate in the classroom seems to be a factor in the avoidance of violence in school, and the consensus of norms in the classroom could be one of the ways to achieve this (De Vicente Abad, 2017; Povedano et al., 2015).

Finally, in addition to the implementation of prevention measures, it is important to conduct specific workshops in schools for both teachers and psycho-pedagogical support teams, explaining to them the signs—very subtle at times—that allow early detection of situations of school violence and, mainly, the prevention of situations of victimization in the classroom (Cava, 2011).
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