

The Student – Educator Relationship as a Prevention and Management Tool for School Violence and Bullying

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Abstract – School violence and bullying are forms of aggressive behavior which as a rule are deliberate and harmful. In some cases, they are persistent and may continue for long periods of time such as months or even years. Most of the times the individuals who are subjected to school bullying are quite difficult to defend themselves. Aggressive behaviors and cases of violence and bullying constitute elements of a daily school reality. The intensity of such incidents and the scientific interest led to it becoming a research target for many fields such as psychology, sociology, pedagogy and political science, bringing to the surface at the same time the complexity and composite nature of the issue. The target of this research study is the qualitative examination of the educators’ and the students’ aspects concerning the role – tool of good interpersonal relationships and the prevention and management of incidents of school violence and bullying.

Keywords – School Violence, Bullying, Prevention, Management, Student – Educator Relationship.

I. INTRODUCTION

Incidents of violence and aggressiveness which are manifested through school bullying attitudes have become usual occurrences within the school environment. The mobilization to inform and raise awareness of the educational community is constant and systematic, aiming at the restriction of the direct repercussions of school bullying, which is the victimization of children and adolescents (Galanaki, 2010).

The management of daily behavioral problems within the classroom as well as the stress that results from them, are issues that worry educators to a great extent (Peters, 1970). Ignoring the phenomenon or handling it with punitive practices bring short-term results and contributes to the perpetuation of the problem (Matsopoulos, 2009).

The present research study presents a bibliographical review of issues of prevention and management of school bullying and victimization incidents, as well as the development of good interpersonal relationships among educators and students. There is an examination of the educators’ and students’ aspects concerning the role – tool of good interpersonal relationships, in preventing and managing incidents of school violence and bullying, as they emerge through research data.

II. THE PHENOMENON OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND BULLYING

A. Determining the Phenomenon

The concepts of violence and school bullying are referred to as a field of antisocial behaviors in the school premises (Dawkins, 1995). According to Roberts Jr. (2006), school bullying is determined as the combination of verbal and physical attacks and abuse, which are addressed to a target-victim from a culprit-victimizer. Olweus (1993), who is a pioneer in the research of the phenomenon, determines bullying as a repeated and for a substantial time period exposure of a child to negative actions of another student or students in the form of violent or aggressive behavior. According to Olweus (1993), the repeated aggressive behaviors

and the imbalance of power are the appendant elements of the intention of one or more individuals in order to harm or discomfort someone else. The imbalance of power involves imbalance in physical strength as well as in personality dynamics (Chatzigeorgiou & Antoniou, 2016).

There is a special reference concerning aggressive behavior from behaviorists. They point out that this kind of behavior is the result of learning and constitutes a separate category of social behavior. The behaviorists determine this particular phenomenon either based on the prevailing conditions before this specific aggressive behavior manifests, or based on the repercussions after its manifestation (Psalti & Konstantinou, 2020). In the first case the victimizer's intentions can be interpreted, in which case it is the classic definition of Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer and Sears (1939). The aggressive behavior aims at insulting, harming or injuring the individual who is targeted. In the second case, there is a record of the repercussions on the victim, and Parke and Slaby (1983), contrary to the classic definition, support that aggressive behavior is determined by its repercussions which are negative for the victim (Kalantzi-Azizi & Zafiropoulou, 2004).

School violence and bullying belong to the category of human relationships. They are group phenomena since they concern the involvement of several people. Apart from the bully-victimizer and the bullied-victim there are other people involved such as the onlookers (students, educators and parents), who either witness the incident or are aware of its existence (Rassidaki, 2015). Aggressiveness among peer students has been focused on especially in the school premises. It is quite hard to find another issue relevant to the school environment and the learning processes, as notorious as violence in the school premises (Chinas & Chrysafidis, 2000). Research data from relevant studies do not show a clear picture of school violence and bullying since they do not always come to the same conclusions. Methodological issues mainly (ex. conceptual definition of bullying, sample choice), as well as matters of ideological nature of the researchers, lead to conflicting scientific aspects. As a consequence, researchers find it difficult to ascertain that aggressiveness in the school environment increases dramatically as it has been debated (Chatzichristou, Vaitis, Dimitropoulou & Falki, 2000).

In reports about school bullying or victimization, the English terms are usually used in the Greek language. Bullying is mainly observed in the school environment and makes it very hard for the students to adjust. Victimization is the direct result of bullying, that is, a particular form of aggressive behavior with special characteristics (Tsiantis, 2000). In order for the terms school violence, bullying, and victimization to be used there should be a repetition of specific acts with consistent frequency and intention towards weak students (Tsiakalos, 2000). According to Artinopoulou (2010), the basic forms of school violence involve violence through electronic means and interpersonal ones. Interpersonal violence includes forms of violence such as: verbal, emotional, psychological, physical, social, sexual, racist and blackmail. Aggressive behaviors are either obvious and visible by everyone, or indirect which are not perceptible (Andreou, 2011).

Rigby (2000), suggests three criteria of seriousness: the nature of behavior, the duration in time and the frequency. Based on these criteria, bullying can be characterized as harsh, intermediary and low, in which most of the cases of school violence appertain to and can potentially deteriorate in time. The repercussions of aggressive behavior and victimization concern all students, male or female, who are involved in such incidents. The main repercussions include low academic performance, increased absence from school and limited psycho-social adjustment of children (Bauman & Yoon, 2014). In certain cases, the repercussions can prove catastrophic for the child's socialization and the development of a healthy behavior and personality.

The development of prevention programs in order to deal with the phenomenon and its repercussions is necessary. School constitutes the standard place as far as the occurrence of the phenomenon is concerned, therefore all necessary actions and cooperation to manage the phenomenon effectively should be coordinated and implemented in the school premises (Giannakopoulou, 2014).

B. Prevention Programs

According to Olweus (1993), bullying behavior can be fought with a special focus on three basic levels: at school as a community, in the classroom and with every child individually. Likewise, the European Union determines that educational policy for the prevention and management of violent and bullying behaviors must be based on the educators, the school classroom, the students, the school, the natural environment, the family and the community (Artinopoulou, 2001). In the Study for Violence against Children which was devised by the U.N. in 2006, it is recommended that governments take measures in order for schools to act preemptively against school violence and intervene effectively to protect the children-victims (Moschos, Tsagari & Moschopoulou, 2010). Prevention, creating an atmosphere of cooperation, rule of law and mutual respect among the members of

the school community are the basic characteristics mentioned in the Child's Ombudsman's suggestions and the Guide for the Democratic Governance of Schools (Moschos, Tsagari & Moschopoulou, 2010).

The educators' role is decisive for the prevention and management of incidents. For this reason, during the planning and the implementation of the programs the educators' aspects and personal views concerning the phenomenon and its management strategies, are taken into consideration (Boulton, Hardcastle, Down, Fowles & Simmonds, 2013). School violence and bullying are completely connected with what happens in the society in general. As a consequence, the special characteristics – internally and externally – of the systems which are about to be implemented, are taken into consideration, while they involve practices which combine elements of experiential and collaborative learning, such as, encouragement and empathy, in an atmosphere that fosters acceptance and solidarity. The systems aim at the improvement of the students' self-confidence and the skills concerning interaction, negotiation and defense of boundaries. The problem of violence and bullying is mostly an issue of problematic relationships within the school environment. The target is the improvement of human relationships and the change of the atmosphere in order to trigger positive emotions in everyone who is involved in the educational process (Matsopoulos, 2009). The school atmosphere should be filled with respect, communication and responsibility creating positive feelings (Chinas & Chrisafidis, 2000). In such an environment the students will have the ability to express their feelings and seek with certainty support and assistance from an adult or peer.

Change and improvement of the school atmosphere is directly connected with the existence of good interpersonal relationships between educators and students. So, there is a demarcation of the issue of interpersonal relationships, the elements that characterize them, their importance for the change of the school atmosphere, the educators' role and the importance of communication in their forming.

C. Demarcation of Relationships

The educational process is conducted in the school environment whose psycho-social dimension is formed by the developing relationships between students and educators (Baralos & Fotopoulou, 2010). Students and educators interact and develop relationships, which in their uniqueness, intervene and transform the content of knowledge and edification (Anagnostopoulou, 2005). Characteristic elements of good interpersonal relationships are mutual respect, trust, interest, empathy, willingness to listen to one another, support, acceptance of diversity, cooperation in settling conflicts, exchange of ideas and expression of feelings (Dinkmeyer, McKay & Dinkmeyer, 1980). Interpersonal relationships are affected by individual features of educators and students (ex. gender, age, socioeconomic background, school atmosphere, school administration and parents). Further factors of impact, as far as relationships are concerned, are for students, performance, diligence, concentration in class and consistency, while for educators are, personality, kindness, honesty, sense of humor, communication skills and their educational measures (Anagnostopoulou, 2005, Baralos & Fotopoulou, 2010).

According to the conventional aspect, interpersonal relationships between educator and students function from the educator towards the student. The educator imposes his will on the students who subject to him. It is evident that in such a relationship no interaction is allowed (Matsaggouras, 1999). On the contrary, contemporary learning theories revise the conventional hierarchical character of relationships. Learning in a contemporary environment is a communicative activity in which imparting knowledge from the teacher to the student no longer applies (McH & Bruner, 1987). Based on group cooperative teaching, the school's pursuit is to establish the students' active participation in the learning process. Students cooperate, communicate and interact (Matsaggouras, 2000). Individual targets are connected with group ones resulting in the creation of a feeling of security and increase the classroom's cohesion (Zergiotis, 2007).

D. The Educator's Role

The educator's role is decisive and is characterized by his ability to create effective learning conditions by energizing the group (Bakirtzis, 2002). He is aware of the learning readiness of his students, their needs and interests, he plans and organizes learning processes so that teaching will be enjoyable and learning effective for all students (Tomlinson, 2021). "The educator may function as a catalyst and affect the creation of a cooperative atmosphere in the classroom and an effective communication among students as well as between himself and the students" (Brouzos, 1998, p.76). Good quality of interpersonal relationships contributes to the learning process, establishes relationships of trust and mutual respect, limits conflicts and contributes to the development of a positive attitude for school (Thomson, 1997). The improvement it brings upon the learning development and

behavior, along with the school atmosphere are considered factors of an effective school (Pamouktsoglou, 2001). The relationships between educator and students develop through interactive actions in the form of communication.

E. Communication in Development of Interpersonal Relationships

Word is an important tool of interaction and at the same time a strong base of interpersonal relationships (Anagnostopoulou, 2005). Verbal communication constitutes the main means of teaching and forming of the psychological atmosphere in the classroom (Matsaggouras, 1987). The quality of questions, the time the educator spends during his communication with every student, the use/abuse of word, the tone (strict, exploratory, encouraging), even the type of reward and the conduct or not of open discussions, operate decisively in the formation of interpersonal relationships. Apart from the content, per se, the emotional content of the verbal expressions used, is of particular importance. Verbal communication is enhanced by the development of focused listening skills. They provide the ability to the educator to form a complete picture of the student's aspect and attitude and energize empathy (Matsaggouras, 1987). Verbal communication is accompanied by a non-verbal communication system involving movements and gestures which may support or destabilize word. Facial expressions may make it difficult or enhance the communicative atmosphere, even operate preventively during a conflict or provide approval and reward (Baralos & Fotopoulou, 2010). Anagnostopoulou (2005), reports that "when students have the ability to approach the educator, react to his messages and provide him with feedback, their disposition and activity in the school classroom increases" (Anagnostopoulou, 2005, p. 81).

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

School violence and interpersonal relationships constitute subjects of scientific research. When educators use the term school bullying, they refer only to the physical attacks, without including verbal aggressive behaviors or exclusion. It is worth mentioning that, while they believe that they have the responsibility to deal with these incidents, they state that they do not have the self-confidence required and ask for training concerning this matter. These ascertainments result from Boulton's (1997) survey of 138 educators in order to examine attitudes concerning school bullying. In another survey by Craig, Henderson and Murphy (2000), 116 Canadian university students from Pedagogical Departments participated. It is referred that physical more than verbal attacks are more likely to be included in the term of school bullying. As far as social exclusion is concerned, the result is that it cannot be detected as easily, while they consider that educators with increased empathy comprehend better situations of victimization.

In a transnational survey which was conducted by Asimopoulos et.al. (2008) for the Research University Institute of Mental Health (R.U.I.M.H.), students express negative aspects about the efforts of the school to deal with bullying. They consider that problematic behaviors are approached in a fragmentary way, they assess educators negatively for their response to pleas for intervention and appportion incompetence in protecting the victim from potential retribution from the victimizer. In the same survey the educators seem disappointed with the provided support on a training level, and point out the lack of specialized educational personnel, as well as the low level of cooperation and communication among the members of the school community (Asimopoulos, Chatzipempou, Soumaki, Diareme, Giannakopoulou & Tsiantis, 2008).

In a more recent transnational survey, six years later, by Kyriakou, Mylonakou-Keke & Stephens (2014), which was conducted in Greece, England and Norway, there was an examination of the students' aspects concerning bullying in the school environment. The students of all three countries seem to have a good perception of the forms and dimensions of bullying. They believe that the present school must assume the role to deal with the problem, through prevention, by developing organized socio-pedagogical programs and involving all the individuals who are related to the particular problematic situations. They support that a positive school atmosphere can satisfy the need of victims and victimizers to be understood, supported, assisted and guided by a trustworthy adult (Kyriakou, Mylonakou-Keke & Stephens, 2014). Similar research results are available in the survey of HBSC/WHO (Health Behavior in School-aged Children) in 2010 (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Fotiou & Kanavou, 2011). A panhellenic typical sample of teenage students (Sixth Graders, Eighth Graders and Tenth Graders) from 306 school units, participated in the survey. Victimizers and victims are not satisfied by the management level, they feel insecure and consider the imposed school rules unfair. They keep low expectations from learning processes and do not look forward to their participation in them. The student victims are dissatisfied with their relationships with their peers while the victimizers are absent in an inexcusably great frequency. The survey conclusions show an intensity of the elements in comparison to the past and a need for a multifaceted and composite approach in order to prevent and manage school bullying (Kokkevi, Stavrou, Fotiou & Kanavou, 2011).

Belogianni's (2009) reports, concerning a survey of 166 students from the Experimental High School of Attica, are worth mentioning. Student victims of school violence mention that they discussed the incident with a friend of theirs (54.8%), with their parents (30.7%), never mentioned it to anyone (37.3%), while very few chose to report it to an educator (10.2%) or the Administration of the school unit (7.2%). The overwhelming majority of students (74.7%) are willing to participate in prevention programs at school along with the educators.

In 2007, various surveys by the Pedagogical Institute focused on the development of good interpersonal relationships among educators and students, with the topic of Quality and Education at school, and a large sample of participants (Pamouktsoglou, 2001), the students: feel tired (63%), stressed (58%), bored (53%) and frustrated (32%). Positive feelings of joy, pleasure, security and optimism are found in the students' answers but in lower rates. In the same survey and in a 50% rate, educators expressed negative aspects about the capability of school units to promote group activities (Pamouktsoglou, 2001). The Pedagogical Institute also worked on the analysis of the content of the educators' pedagogical written exams (ASEP 2000-01) from Primary Education. The analysis shows that the educators consider that an effective educator should possess the following characteristics, love for his students, communicative skills, sense of humor, enthusiasm and the ability to implement alternative teaching methods (Pamouktsoglou, 2001).

The connection between good relationships and retention of discipline was examined in a study by Oberski, Ford, Higgins and Fisher in 1999 in universities of Great Britain and Scotland. The educators practiced in techniques of building good relationships and retaining of discipline, which was the subject of the research. The research showed the existing connection between good interpersonal relationships in the classroom and disciplined behavior (Oberski, Ford, Higgins & Fisher, 1999).

Xohelis (2000), has been studying research data from the Greek territory about the way the educators perceive their relationships with their students. A percentage of 39.9% (educators with long experience), perceive them as the relationship of father-child, 44.7% (educators with short experience and mainly women) believe that the educator should be the students' friend, while 43.4% consider that the educator should command respect to the students. The aspect that the educator should keep his students in a distance or cause fear, is rejected categorically (Xohelis, 2000). The conducted survey with 658 educators from the Prefecture of Imathia, concerning the educators' aspects about interpersonal relationships (Anagnostopoulou, 2005), brings to the surface the catalytic role of good interpersonal relationships during the educational process and the educators' essential contribution to the effectiveness of the educational task. When interpersonal relationships are of high standard, the educators have the ability to influence their students in matters of learning and behavior, they take pleasure in their colleagues' and parents' respect, and they feel a sense of satisfaction for their profession. When interpersonal relationships are of low standard, the educators feel stressed and bored during their teaching task, they adopt a negative attitude towards their profession and are mentally exhausted. At the same time, they are aware, to a great extent, of the necessity to adjust their teaching methods to the students' needs and interests, to pay attention to their views, and participate in the drafting groups of school rules of conduct. There are objections from educators about situations of students' anger, disobedience to specific rules and creation of an atmosphere that disrupts the learning processes (Anagnostopoulou, 2005).

IV. DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of violence and bullying in the school environment is real and cannot be ignored. The management of aggressive behaviors with punitive methods from educators and family, despite any temporary attenuation, leads to the perpetuation of the problem (Matsopoulos, 2009). The educators' training – information on this subject is necessary and can strengthen their self-confidence and skills in the management of incidents of violence and communication. It is also deemed necessary to support schools with specialized scientific personnel.

From a different perspective, it is evident that the only effective prevention for bullying in school is the school itself (Asimopoulos, Chatzipemos, Soumaki, Diareme, Giannakopoulou & Tsiantis, 2008). The school must become aware of the problem, recognize it, approach it and listen to the students' experiences and aspects. As it is shown from the aforementioned literature review, a lot of students do not experience positive feelings at school. The joy of learning, of cooperation, the sense of security and trust are experienced on low levels. It appears that there is imbalance in the school units where their target is the cultivation of cognitive abilities at the expense of socio-emotional abilities.

Change of atmosphere along with the development of programs and standard prevention tactics constitute the basic elements in the management strategy for the phenomenon. In order to change the atmosphere, the contribution of quality and good interpersonal relationships among educators and students, is deemed important. The theoretical review shows the transformation of the educator's role, who has the responsibility to form a sincere communicative framework based on acceptance, sincerity, cooperation and reciprocity. As Karavoltsoy (2013) mentions about supportive educators, they have the ability to connect personally with their students and care about the class as a group. They devote extra time to discuss matters of teaching methodology and class management with students and colleagues, and they often bring up similar discussions to the teaching board. They invest on a healthy social atmosphere in the classroom with the scientific certainty that it is not a waste of time. They are interested in issues of violence, they actively support the victims and set specific boundaries to the victimizers, always showing respect towards them, while initiating the necessary processes in every school environment in order for the problem to be solved.

On the other side, research concerning interpersonal relationships, shows that there are educators who find it difficult to tolerate non-acceptable behaviors which defy authority or disrupt the atmosphere in the classroom. They consider these behaviors an obstacle in developing relationships. These aspects are undoubtedly accompanied by anti-pedagogical comments, tensions and conflicts.

V. CONCLUSION

Incidents of violence and bullying have become a school reality. Their intensity and scientific interest have become the research focus of many scientific fields. Since the middle of 2000s, researchers have dealt with school violence to a great extent, with main research subjects the examination of the extent of the phenomenon, the frequency and the forms of aggressive behaviors. It is worth mentioning the differentiation in recent surveys which examine the phenomenon of violence and bullying exclusively in the school environment, while previous ones mostly examined adolescent delinquency in the whole spectrum of their social interactions (Galanaki, 2010). The development of quality interpersonal relationships at school can certainly contribute to an atmosphere of integration and support for the students regardless of the learning objectives and behavioral characteristics and operate as a tool in the prevention and management of incidents of school violence and bullying.

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