

Brief consideration on the use of the theatre of oppressed in anti-bullying activities in schools

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Abstract. The problem of bullying is of great importance in education, due to the severity of its consequences. The paper aims to present some ideas about how theatre, as an art form, can be used in the fight against bullying in education. In this context, the use of the theatre concept of the oppressed as a tool to combat bullying behaviours can be more successful, as the act of denouncing oppression through actions, mimicry and gestures, through the tones of voice, leads to the setting of benchmarks. between the participating students / children and the educational community. Starting from the idea presented by the Brazilian writer and activist Augusto Bool, in turn influenced by the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire, we aim to stop the phenomenon of bullying by introducing different theatre sequences in which children get involved, identify, analyse and explore, so as the spectators ask them to do, and in the end, in this way, it transforms the reality in which they live.

1 Why about bullying?

The problem of bullying is one that constantly concerns the world of education. Although it is not a new phenomenon, the situations that students are currently facing due to bullying, have led to negative effects on the evolution of children, future adults, including the loss of human lives.

Regardless of the form it takes, bullying destroys and makes impossible the fulfilment of the school's mission, that of "educational institution, a protected environment, a living space, a land of experience, a socializing authority, a selection tool and a reproductive institution. of society" [1].

"School should be a safe and positive educational environment" (Olweus et al., 2010). It is an axiom with which we all agree, although the conditional "should" shows that things are not exactly right. The 1970s marked the beginning of systematic research into the phenomenon of bullying through the early studies of Swedish professor Dan Olweus at Bergen University in Norway. Marked by the suicide of three victims of bullying, the researchers focused on this topic and helped pave the way for further studies. Since then, bullying has been seen as a documented international phenomenon in the Scandinavian

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countries, England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Greece, Australia, the USA, Canada and the United States, Japan [2].

We can say without exaggeration there is no school in which this phenomenon not to be felt, in its verbal, physical form, through gossip, rumours, biased posts on social networks, etc. Adults often do not attach much importance to these facts, considering they are part of the growing arsenal of children and that it is a natural part of the development of their social skills. Teachers and even parents are rather willing to overlook such events, considering that one day things will stop by themselves and “the minds will finally come to the children.”

Unfortunately, these facts have negative effects and long-term consequences on the emotional development of children and not infrequently, children subjected to bullying end up resorting to suicide, because they can no longer withstand the negative pressure of oppressors.

In order to have a correct understanding of what the term bullying includes, it is important to see exactly which of these activities of students can fall into this category. In other words, let's see what is and what is not bullying.

1.1 What is bullying?

There are different definitions regarding this subject. In his paper “Personality and Aggression”, Olweus [2], gave the meaning of bullying : “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. It is a negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another—basically what is implied in the definition of aggressive behavior”.

On the other hand, in their edited book “School bullying: insights and perspectives”, [3] the authors declare regarding bullying behavior:” it is a systematic abuse of power which suggests a desire for intimidation and domination”. In the same time, bullying is considered as a prevalent problem in schools [4],), and the result of it is some health problems and negative psychosocial consequences for directly involved students [2].

School-bullying could be defined as the realization of intentional, repetitive, harmful actions, or words, or other behaviors, such as swearing, threats, committed by a child or group of children against another child or group of children”.

It should be noted that not every negative incident is a form of bullying. As example, occasional incidents of rejection or social antipathy or spontaneous acts of aggression, disagreement or fighting are not necessarily bullying. In order to be defined as bullying behaviour, the following characteristics must exist:

- to be intentional and this is easily visible because the aggressors have the obvious intention of hurting the victims.
- there is an imbalance of power: the aggressors are stronger than their victims, and in addition, the victims cannot defend themselves (because they are physically inferior and sometimes younger in age, as the aggressor).
- bullying is repeated periodically, sometimes even over several years.

We can rightly ask ourselves, what makes some children become aggressors, and other victims. Research shows that victims are usually viewed as strange, deviant, or behaving differently, not integrated into the class group [5]. If the other children consider the victim to be behaving in a way that does not conform to the group, if they are seen as “nerds” or favoured by teachers, they will no doubt end up attacking the victim.

Other reported reasons for bullying are related to the way the victim looks (too fat, too weak or helpless anyway), the fact that she is richer (and then the bullying actions are

directed to take her sandwiches, pocket money, various supplies academic, etc.) too beautiful (and here comes the jealousy or dispute of a peer of the opposite sex). Owens, Shute, and Slee (2000) undertook a focus group on adolescent girls on their motivation to become aggressors. The causes of this behaviour were: the desire to stand out, to become important in the group, to gain notoriety, to manifest their superiority over victims. Other causes, resulting from the study undertaken by [6], refer to the desire to get rid of boredom and to be fun.

Bullying can be committed by a single person, or by a group. The victim can also be a person or a group. Most of the time, in the context of school bullying, the victim is usually a single student. The actors of the bullying process are:

- the perpetrator / aggressor.
- victim.
- spectators.

If we refer to school bullying, it happens in a certain physical location, usually in or around the school [6], which may include the following: classroom, the school yard, the school sports facilities, the school toilets, the road to and from school.

1.2 The impact of bullying on students and schools

Victims of aggression are very visible because they easily react to the behaviour of an aggressor. The non-verbal language and behaviour of the victims betrays their weakness and the fact that they feel insecure. They behave in a passive, silent and withdrawn manner. They do not show assertiveness and do not resist. Also, the victims do not have a friend to support and help them.

Victims of aggression experience negative emotions, but often mental health problems. The effects of the aggression on the victims are felt both immediately and, in the future [7]. Physical, emotional and social suffering can accompany them throughout their lives. Victims often lose interest in the things and activities they once enjoyed. For parents, certain signs such as headaches, stomach aches, insomnia, crying crises and refusal to eat may be signs of a possible harassment to which the child is subjected. In severe cases, when neither the school nor the family intervened, the victim's problems led him to suicide. Another response of the victims may be their transformation into aggressors, by applying violence to others.

Studies on the long-term psychological effects of adolescents have shown that, regardless of the role played in aggression, victims, or aggressors, have developed negative developments on mental health in adulthood. Of course, they were differentiated in the sense that the victims presented different forms of depression, in time the aggressors later appeared abusive on the family - wife, children, etc. In addition, in the case of the aggressors, the risk of committing antisocial acts was much extended, as well as the abusive consumption of prohibited substances. In both groups there was a significant increase in psychiatric hospitalization due to mental health. and balance disorders [8].

You might think that for those watching from the side-line, there is no effect. But reality proves otherwise. Looking at the aggression event can have a huge impact on the bystander. It is a human feeling to be impressed when someone around you is offended, hit, or ridiculed. Looking at the act, the viewer experiences intense emotions and stress, ranging from uncertainty and anxiety to fear and guilt. Here, too, research has shown that victims suffer psychologically, as do victims and aggressors. Moreover, their physical, academic, and mental health is threatened, even in the long term.

You might be wondering why these bystanders don't react? The 1970 research made by John Darley and Bibb Latane showed that individuals react late due to the phenomenon known as "spreading responsibility." They practically do not feel responsible and wait for

others to take action. This slows down their reaction until they no longer react at all. At the same time, they are attentive to the others reactions . Because these others do not respond, this confirms that they do not have to get involved. This state of inertia is called the "spectator effect"[9].

2. Using the theatre against bullying

When there is already a theatre company in the school, it could set as its goal the dramatization of bullying phenomena. The appeal to the theatre is since it can change the lives of those who get involved in it, but also of those who witness it. In this way students from all three categories could be co-opted: victims, aggressors, by-standers. By exposing to different situations of bullying both for the public and for the actors, it will have the effect of increasing the awareness, understanding of what they feel and tolerance towards others, and in this way increasing the empathy between students. By involving all categories of participants in bullying events in theatre sessions would have the effect of changing children's attitudes towards interpersonal relationships, would lead to an awareness of how the other feels and the factors underlying their attitudes and behaviour. At the same time, it would identify ways in which aggression can be avoided or ended.

To reduce or even stop bullying situations, theatre, through its various forms, can make an important contribution [10]. We are talking here about verbalized theatre, but also about the theatre of the oppressed, variants that by the fact that they involve both actors and spectators, victims and aggressors, make them look like people, human beings who experience the same feelings, emotions and feelings.

Thus, through theatrical dramatizations, students can be put in real life situations, to solve through drama, a problem of aggression.

2.1 Verbatim Theatre

Theatrical experiences since the beginning of the twentieth century have focused on documentary theatre, i.e., that form of theatre that uses certain documentary materials such as newspapers, interviews, correspondence, etc. as a starting point for stories about real events and people, without changing the text in the show. This genre bears various names, such as textual theatre, investigative theatre, witness theatre, autobiographical theatre and ethno- drama (ethno-theatre).

Verbatim Theatre is usually created by transcribing interviews with people who are connected to a common event or topic. The interviews are then edited into a performance text. Actors are often involved in conducting this research and providing the writer, director, or company that makes the play.

Together with the students, the teachers can create a textual piece, starting from an in-depth research, on the subject, like the one carried out by an investigative journalist.

The textual theatre is then built through the transcripts of interviews with students, interviews on bullying events. The transcripts are then analysed and combined to form the script of the play. The gain is related to the fact that, even if the actors are not the ones who take the interviews, through the contact with the interviewees, they observe the words they use, study their behaviours, verbal language, with verbal templates, but also nonverbal. In this way they internalize the moods, emotions, fears, and excess of power that the interviewees transmit.

In composing the play can be used several techniques like juxtapose and voice off. The latter one may belong to a student-actor who appears somewhere in the play or to a specialized vocal actor.

Juxtaposition is a process that can increase the quality of a piece. Such a procedure can be performed when alternative scenes are presented at different times. An example of this can be the presentation of an event through a sequence at the present time and then its projection into the future. Realizing this contrast between scenes / sequences brings to light a perspective of things that would be, perhaps, in other situations, difficult for the public to detect. The audience (but also the actors) see past events and contrast them with current ones, thus helping the audience to understand the consequences of past events on the character's present.

Another technique specific to textual theatre is called alienation. Its role is to make the audience not forget that the play is not real, and in this case not to be emotionally affected. Basically, the alienation occurs because the actors speak directly to the audience. In this situation, the public participates through a critical analysis, rather than emotional one. Another technique refers to the use of background sounds that should impress the audience, creating suspense. In the same context, lights, where the school has such props, can be very useful. By varying their intensity or by the lights and shadows they create, they can strengthen the verbal message and deepen it.

Soliloquy is another technique in spoken theatre, through which the actor, alone on stage he tells himself about his most intimate thoughts, allowing the audience to know these thoughts. In this way there is an interaction between the audience and the actor, the audience internalizing the actor's words, with all their repertoire of emotions, feelings, sentiments and hopes.

Finally, polyphony (also called multiple voices) can be used in the form of a large number of voices that present as many points of view as possible. The procedure can be applied to give more freedom to the characters. In this way, they have a wider space for interaction, they can support contrary ideas, they can argue with each other or with the one who wrote the script of the play. In this way, all opposing or partisan points of view are brought to light and exhausted. They make a critical analysis of the situation, from the perspective of different characters.

2.2 The theatre of the oppressed

Treating the phenomenon of bullying can have a hope in using the specific methods of the theatre of the oppressed. His techniques were conceived by Augusto Boal, the Brazilian playwright who for over 40 years helped the oppressed to open the dialogue between spectators and actors, to influence the evolution of the play and implicitly the action. In Boal's opinion, oppression occurs when the dialogue between people turns into a monologue.

The techniques of the theatre of the oppressed are highlighted through a series of techniques, games, and exercises based on the body and the senses. In this way, the real experiences of the participants are involved, through which they can critically reflect on social realities, they can link a dialogue and even further, they can contribute to finding common solutions, from the bottom up, for their social problems. The theatre of the oppressed is an exercise that involves interactive participation and in this way people built a safe space in which they can repeat their actions and further, to find for themselves the most suitable variants of social transformation for real life.

The techniques in which this form of theatre can be presented are image and forum theatre.

Forum-theatre is the most frequently approached and has the widest spread in the whole world. Specific to this form of theatre is the fact that forum plays are dramatized and performed by members of certain communities, confronted with difficult life problems. In

such a training workshop, participants enter the game, do exercises and apply critical analysis on the problems they face socially.

Through the forum theatre, a social intervention is carried out that makes it possible for people to get out of situations of oppression and take measures against it. Thus, situations related to oppression based on age, sex or sexuality, race or ethnicity, etc. can be staged. In this dramatization, the spectators do not have the role of some passive witnesses; they have the right to stop performing, they can bring other solutions or changes and they are even allowed to go on stage to show and argue their ideas.

The debut starts from the public presentation of a social problem, brought to light by the play of the actors on the stage, in the version in which it evolved, until that moment. Then a specific character to this form of theatre, appears, a Joker, who draws the public's attention that the situation will be resumed and that if someone in the audience has a desire or an impulse to bring about a change, he must stand up and shout "stop". Next, the person will take a seat and the public will receive the invitation to show the solution of the moment. Members of the public need to interpret the solution, not explain what they would like to change.

After completing the intervention, Joker asks the public to contribute to the proposed solution and expand the range of solutions. All non-violent ideas that show how to improve the oppressive situation for the protagonist are encouraged and those who issue these ideas are invited to present their solutions on stage. The public is then asked to decide which of the proposed solutions is the most appropriate.

Forum-theatre invites the viewer not only to use words, but to highlight through action what can be changed and for that he must go on stage, change the place with the actor and thus present the strategy for solving the problem discussed. In this way, the spectator becomes an actor. Each new intervention of a spectator gives the Joker the opportunity to open a discussion about the proposed strategy. The rule of this forum-theatre is that, during the communication and dialogue between spectators and actors, it is considered that there are no mistakes or erroneous interventions, because the theatre is a space open to imagination and creativity. Therefore, any new idea or strategy that leads to a unique experience, through which solutions are found to change reality and through which they agree the strategy can be applied or not is welcome. In this way, the dialogue between actors and spectators produces a new reality.

The forum theatre does not focus on solutions, but sheds light on the process itself, the discussions and the ability of people to be prepared for action on stage, which would lead to the same behaviour on and off stage. For intimidation, this is very important because it would eliminate the participation of those uninvolved spectators, who are often a support group for harassers. Moreover, by learning a behaviour of change, those spectators could become the victim support group.

At the same time, victims will gain more self-confidence and increase their ability to oppose the aggressor, learn to ask for help and learn how to talk to parents, teachers or other adults who can help.

The presentation of aggression situations in different forms of theatre, leads, without discussion, to the transposition of these analyses and thoughts into real life. In this way, by analogy with what was presented and happened on stage, certain reflex reactions occur and intolerance to certain types of behaviour develops.

The image theatre aims to bring reality to light, without using the spoken word, but only through the verbal expression offered by the images and paintings of human bodies. Through such a technique, actors create static images or paintings by sculpting their own body, or that of others. Basically, the nonverbal language as well as the face, the proximity and the expression of the face, all these speak and transmit in an expressive and synthetic form, about tragic situations, about different ideas or feelings. The role of the spectators is

to suggest how far the figures approach or move away, how they should gesture, in what plane they should face. In this way, all participants build the picture and can even assign a series of words, phrases and even a dialogue - to the actors who make up the figures in the pictures. The actors can then move in certain frames, they can have monologues, a quietly voice, to suggest an inner monologue with a muffled voice, but strong enough to be heard by the spectators. In this process called dynamization, the static picture comes to life, as each actor, embodying a certain figure, goes through his role.

Augusto Boal's theatre of the oppressed was influenced by the work of pedagogue Paulo Freire, who starts from the basic premise that people deepen their humanism by developing strong relationships and through sustained work. In Freire's vision, education presupposes a teacher-student relationship in which each of the actors builds knowledge and learning, so that an education and mutual influence are exercised. And in this process of participatory democracy, people are increasingly accepting to take on the role of active actors and agents of change.

3. Conclusion

The problem of aggression, through the great problems it brings to the mental and emotional development of children, through its long-term impact, should be in the attention not only of parents, schools and educators, but also of those who design educational policies.

Using dramatization to raise awareness of the dramas behind an act of aggression, as well as to learn pro-social behaviour should be considered a priority in any school curriculum. Such exercises, through which students learn to speak in public, to condemn injustice and violence, are necessary, after all, to form the profile of any citizen, who will see replicated, at different scales and in different stages, such situations.

Adopting an attitude, speaking in favour of the victims, learning to defend a cause, either through the power of argument or by convincing a nonverbal message, all of them are actions that the school must practice with students to make them learn these behaviours. At an early age, students can be easily sensitized when they become aware of the harm and suffering their gestures cause to others. Through such dramatizations they can practice and understand all the roles, with all their arsenal of feelings and moods. Finally, through such dramatization exercises, students understand that any dispute must be treated by the power of the word, by rational arguments and thus manifest their superiority over other species.

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