Co-creating Short Video Films to Raise Elementary School Students' Awareness of Bullying

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Abstract

Bullying has attracted worldwide research interest mainly due to its negative effects on the children involved. In this study, students participated in creating and performing their own theatre pieces, three short video films about body shaming, racial discrimination, and cyberbullying. The purpose of the study was to explore gender differences in bullying and victimization among 20 preadolescent 6th-grade students, identify possible changes in behaviour after the film co-creating process, and adapted strategies for addressing bullying. This study explored the hypothesis that children who were actively involved in this play-creating process, would report less bullying and victimization behaviour. Results revealed that boys and girls reported more bullying and victimization behaviour before their participation and less afterwards. Girls also tended to use strategies such as assertiveness or withdrawal. These findings suggest that anti-bullying programs may alter students' behaviour and should be taken into account by education professionals, researchers, and policymakers.

Keywords: Co-creation, Short Films, Bullying, Victimization, Education

Drama's potential as a bullying prevention aid

Deployment of drama and theatre has been designated of utmost importance as bullying prevention aids (Bradshaw, 2015; Joronen et al., 2011; Polanin, et al., 2012). Drama in education allows those participating in its actions to deepen their level of thought (Dogru, 2015), develop constructive social interactions and relations in which all people involved may define their feelings, and exercise total control over them (Galazka, A., 2016). In the past century, role-play activities have grown in use and variety in the classroom (Donohoe, 2019). Play in the context of learning has been accepted as an essential practice for all primary students acting as a form of practice and preparation for adult life (Caldwell-Cook, 1917), while the combination of role-playing and discussion has noted to help participants enhance their social and emotional learning skills (Bolton, 1979). In the same vein, recent studies advocate that the adoption of different role perspectives in the way people see and perceive the world, can develop the potential for empathy and the understanding of complex situations (Bragshaw et al., 2015) At the same time, simulating real-life experiences can be quite useful in the classroom (Clapper, 2010), as realism in bullying intervention strategies has been emphasized to enhance students' level of engagement and also support them in developing more explicit and deeper insights about (Ortiz-Bush, Schultz, 2016). That kind of consideration helps us understand that the engagement in meaningful experiences of bullying incidents via the body, feeling, and thought experiences (Bragshaw et al., 2015) in conjunction with

discussion can lead to a generation of empathy which often can be distinctly lacking in bullying situations (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, Altoe, 2007; Donohoe, 2018).

The rationale for the current study

Although numerous researchers and practitioners have emphasized the positive effect drama in education can have on a child's cognitive and affective development (Bradshaw, 2015; Joronen et al., 2011; Polanin et al., 2012, Dogru, 2015; Galazka, 2016; Donohoe, 2019; Caldwell-Cook, 1917; Bolton, 1979; Bragshaw et al., 2015) and on potential modifications of student behaviour and limits aggression, in combination with raising the awareness and understanding of the bullying phenomenon (Shiakou & Piki, 2018) a gap still exists in valid and reliable measurements and theory-based research aiming at understanding specific intervention components and its effectiveness (Joronen et al., 2011).

In light of this knowledge and research gap in mind, the aim of this study was the inclusion of students as an integral part of the dramatic process by co-creating and performing three short video films about body shaming, racial discrimination, and cyberbullying. Thus, students were given the opportunity to become active creators of content rather than passive consumers (Casey et al., 2014) consistent with a constructivist teaching and learning philosophy. It should be noted that this was the first attempt for co-creating short video films aiming at raising awareness on bullying and identifying a possible change in bullying and victimization behaviour for elementary students living in Greece, thus addressing a gap in the research.

Participants and context

The study involved 20 students of the 6th Grade aged 12 years old and male (n=10) and female students (n=10) were equally represented in the sample and also three teachers who had the role of the coordinators and facilitators of the educational process. All, the participants participated in an eTwinning project to meet like-minded students, share ideas, learn, and broaden their horizons. The project under the title "Leaving Bullying Behind" was conducted during the school year 2018-2019 at the Experimental Primary School of the University of Thessaloniki in the city of Thessaloniki, in northern Greece. Teachers and students collaborated with a secondary school in Portugal within a secure network and e-Twinning live platform. The eTwinning project started in January and ended by June and participants used online communication via eTwinning once per week. The aim of the eTwinning project was to reflect deeply on this subject, allowing students to share their thoughts and convictions through the strength of their voice, becoming part of an effective and real change in the relationships between all individuals, definitely leaving Bullying behind.

Aim and Research Questions

Previous studies provided conflicting results concerning differences in bullying and victimization between male and female adolescents (Giménez et al., 2015; Macaulay, Boulton, Betts, 2018; Chan & Wong, 2019; Mohseny et al., 2019; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008). In an attempt to shed some more light on this issue, the present study sought to explore gender differences in bullying and victimization among a sample of Greek early adolescents, identify the possible changes in bullying and victimization behaviour after the film-creating process, and adapted strategies for addressing bullying. Specifically, three research questions were addressed:

- Is there a significant difference in bullying and victimization scores between male and female preadolescents?

-Does the film creating process invoke changes in boys' and girls' bullying and victimization behaviour?

-What are the most common strategies adopted by male and female preadolescents for addressing bullying?

Data collection methods

The Bullying and Victimisation Questionnaire (BVQ) was constructed for the purposes of this study. It consists of 24 items (12 measuring bullying and 12 victimization). No other standardized measure of bullying and victimization is in existence in the Greek language. The BVQ was created, in part, to address this problem and to progressively develop a culturally appropriate instrument in this context. Questions cover a wide range of behaviours, including direct negative physical actions, negative verbal actions commonly associated with bullying (Olweus, 1993), and subtle forms of bullying.

A pre-test/post-test was used to measure any possible change in students' bullying and victimization behaviour after co-creating and film participating. Their bullying and victimization behaviour was assessed by "The Bullying and Victimization Questionnaire" (BVQ) (Kokkinos & Panayiotou, 2004). It consists of 24 items (12 measuring bullying and 12 victimization). No other standardized measure of bullying and victimization is in existence in the Greek language. Questions cover a wide range of behaviours, including direct negative physical actions, negative verbal actions commonly associated with bullying (Olweus, 1991), and subtle forms of bullying. The BVQ incorporates all the 12 items from the Austin and Joseph scales, enriched with the addition of another 12 items drawn from the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire.

The questionnaires were administered in class by their teacher who read aloud the standardized instructions, the definition of bullying, and the questions to her students. A short discussion coupled with illustrative examples followed to ensure that all students understand the term 'bullying' and relevant questions were answered as they arose. The questionnaire was filled out anonymously by students in a 50-minute session and, after their completion, the questionnaires were returned to the teacher.

After the film-creating process had finished all students took part in semi-structured interviews. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 40 minutes and were audiotaped.

In the present study, two-independent samples t-tests were used to explore whether there are significant differences in scores on each of the bullying and victimization scales by gender and paired-samples to examine possible change in bullying and victimization behaviour after the film-making process. All statistical testing was performed using SPSS, Version 27 for Mac.

Co-creating procedure

At the beginning of the eTwinning project, students were motivated by their teachers to look through bullying deeper, discuss different types of bullying—for example physical, verbal, sexual, racial, telephone, cyber, and exclusion, revile their own stories as victims or bullies and recognize how serious this social issue is. Teachers used reflective practice to invoke students' personal believes and experiences through group sessions at the beginning of each class. Students were encouraged to reflect on bullying and express their personal insights. After this emotional and intellectual stimulation and reflection students were encouraged to team up to co-create three short videos by selecting the theme, writing the scripts and scenes, choosing characters, and making practical choices of their own.

Students were encouraged to make three silent short films accompanied by the music of their choice. They could also add text of five keywords that appeared as subtitles in English, Greek, and Portuguese language. The duration of each film was set to be two and a half minutes. All scenarios under consideration had to involve direct and indirect bullying, as well as a successful solution to the story problem. Students interactively participated by expressing their opinions and views and sharing their imaginations. They were becoming an integral part of the dramatic process by creating their own theatre pieces.

They finally decided to produce three short video films about body shaming, racial discrimination, and cyberbullying. Students became actors and technicians and made choices by themselves. On the other hand, teachers tried to establish an environment that promoted freedom and acted as facilitators giving the students power over their own work. They

determined the thresholds, boundaries, and structure of productive work in their class and they were always backstage during production to help, provide comfort and confidence to avoid potential chaos.

Students' emotional involvement and connection with their work were apparent because their heroes were actually themselves. The characters were created from a projection of their inner selves. The engagement was retained across the entire process. Students had to take responsibility for all aspects of the three plays. They had to become directors by taking part in most structural decisions, designers by designing scenes and costumes, producers by making suggestions on acting and perform the roles. For example, roles that give the opportunity to exercise power, like "bullies" and on the other hand submissive roles with no power at all, like "victims". Besides these two-character roles, the "follower" character was also created. This character acted like someone who was being involved without really wanting to be involved. Students had to articulate in their minds this power imbalance to create scenarios about body shaming, racial discrimination, and cyberbullying. Although the intense amount of responsibility and work overload, students demonstrated motivation, investment, and engagement in both process and final rehearsals to bring the scripts to the screen.

Filmmaking by its nature is a collaborative effort and requires that students be competent as creators as well as technicians. It took a multitude of students to bring those three films into being. The production required the collaboration of both students and teachers to create the final products. Making films is a highly specialized craft and not all students are equally competent technically. For this reason, students were randomly divided into three groups supervised by a teacher. For teachers, the challenge was to find ways to encourage each student's unique creativity while at the same time evaluating the film creation process. Students were all willing to learn and take instructions for working the scenes. Movie scenes were all shot in natural light at the premises of the Experimental School by using a portable mobile device.

The free DaVinci Resolve 16 software tool was used to produce the three silent short films accompanied by the music of students' choice. This specific tool combines professional 8K editing, colour correction, and non-linear video editing application for macOS, Windows, and Linux. It is professional editing and colour grading system that is suitable for independent users working on SD, HD, and Ultra HD projects. DaVinci Resolve 16 combines professional offline and online editing, colour correction, audio post-production, and visual effects all in one software tool. DaVinci Resolve 16 made it easy for teachers and students to collaborate and explore different toolsets and produce short films [63]. Music was carefully selected by students to heighten emotion and create a mood to make the film story more impactful and memorable. Sound affects mood by simulating reality and creating a dramatic atmosphere.

Evaluation methods: Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews

The questionnaire responses of each student, before the start and after the completion of the project, were used for this comparison. The significance threshold was set to 0.01 for all tests. Initially, two-independent samples t-tests were used to explore whether there are significant differences in scores on each of the bullying and victimization scales by gender. Also, paired t-tests were contacted to measure possible changes in bullying and victimization behaviour by gender before and after the completion of the project.

After the completion of the project and the post-test questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with each student were conducted by the teacher of the class (member of the research group). The interviews ranged in length from 30 to 40 minutes and were audiotaped. Students were asked to discuss how students deal with bullying incidents in school and in the classroom and to suggest some useful strategies they used for addressing bullying in the school.

Results

Results revealed that there was a significant difference in bullying scores between male and female preadolescents, with males scoring higher (M=9.30, SD=1.49) than females (M=5.80, SD=.632); t(12.124)=6,82 p<0.001. Also, there was a significant difference in victimization scores between male and female preadolescents, with females scoring higher (M=7.00, SD=.943) than males (M=4.60, SD=.516); t(13.954)= -7.06, p<.001

The results as shown in Table 1 describe the scores of bullying and victimization behaviour before and after the project. The scores in the behaviour test decreased after the program for both male and female preadolescents.

The male preadolescents' mean score in the bullying behaviour decreased significantly from pre-test (9.30) to post-test (5.90), t(9)=11.129, p=.000<0.01. Likewise, the male preadolescents' mean score in the victimization behaviour decreased significantly from pre-test (4.60) to post-test (2.70), t(9)=5.46 p=.000<0.01.

The female preadolescents' mean score in the bullying behaviour decreased significantly from pre-test (5.80) to post-test (3.50), t(9)=10.77, p=.000<0.01. Likewise, the female preadolescents' mean score in the victimization behaviour decreased significantly from pre-test (7) to post-test (4.20), t(9)=11.22, p=.000<0.01.

Table 1. Comparisons of pre-test and post-test values of males'/females' bullying and victimization behavior

Males n = 10	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Change	p-value
Bullying behavior	9.30 (1.49)	5.90 (1.28)	3.40 (.966)	0.000
Victimization behavior	4.60 (.516)	2.70 (.949)	1.90 (1.10)	0.000
Females n = 10	**Pre-test Mean (SD)**	**Post-test Mean (SD)**	**Change**	**p-value**
Bullying behavior	5.80 (.632)	3.50 (.972)	2.30 (.675)	0.000
Victimization behavior	7 (.943)	4.20 (1.03)	2.80 (.789)	0.000

Moreover, the results of the semi-structured interview were analyzed and a thematic map was produced to display key themes in relation to the research question. Most of the students were quite thoughtful in their responses. Boys' suggestions to decrease bullying behavior included providing bullies with positive attention, raising bullies' self-esteem, while on the other hand girls' suggestion included sending them away, having high self-esteem and self-confidence to discourage bullies, saying "no", ignoring, walking away, and getting help.

Other students, mainly victims, reported significant distress. They felt that they need to be strong and manage the harassment without adult intervention and that bullies should learn what it is like to be bullied. They felt that if a bully knew what it felt like to get bullied, then maybe they would stop.

Discussion

Almost three decades on from Olweus's and Austin's studies (Olweus, 1993; Austin & Joseph, 1996) on bullying and victimization in schools and bullying and victimization remain significant issues with far-reaching consequences for the educational system. Many school-

based intervention programs have been contrived and implemented to decrease school bullying and victimization. The evaluation of the Olweus' anti-bullying program showed a dramatic decrease in the victimization of about half after the program (Olweus, 1993). Ever since at least 15 other large-scale programs based on his principles have been implemented and evaluated in at least 10 other countries (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009).

This mixed-method study was designed to investigate gender differences in bullying and victimization among a sample of Greek early adolescents and identify the possible changes in bullying and victimization behaviour after the film-creating process. This anti-bullying strategy involved the co-creation of three anti-bullying short video films about body shaming, racial discrimination, and cyberbullying. It extended previous research by investigating the possible influence of the filmmaking process on actual students' behaviour as long as possible strategies that bullied students used for addressing the problem and explored these issues using a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews.

Specifically, the bullying and victimization behaviour of twenty 6th graders was measured before and after co-creating and film participating. Their bullying and victimization behaviour was assessed by the "The Bullying and Victimization Questionnaire" (BVQ). Students' strategies for addressing bullying in the school were explored by semi-structured interviews.

The findings clearly demonstrate that there was a significant difference in scores of bullying and victimization behaviour between boys and girls and a change in behaviour after the film creating process.

The results imply that bullying and victimization is a problem in Greek primary school among adolescents and it can be reduced with teamwork and students' emotional investment in collaborative environments. Qualitative data also indicated that girls tended to use unilateral and direct strategies such as non-compliance, assertiveness, or withdrawal while boys tended to use a range of improvement strategies to provide bullies with positive attention and raise bullies' self-esteem.

The findings are in agreement with previous studies (Giménez et al., 2015; Macaulay, Boulton, Betts, 2018; Chan & Wong, 2019; Delgado & Escortell, 2018) reporting that gender could act an essential factor in affecting and determining the kind of bullying experience, with males to report higher levels of involvement in bullying incidents as victims and aggressors than females. Clearly the research literature provides interesting and useful guidance.

This study has a few limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the sample size was small (n=20) and in addition convenient. Insufficient empirical evidence exists to draw conclusions concerning bullying and victimization. More complete results could be drawn from a larger-scale study. Prospective studies would be beneficial to attempt to replicate the results using more randomly selected samples. In defence of the present study, however, one must note that it is the first such project conducted in Greece, and it was helpful in testing and adapting new interventions and strategies so that they can later be utilized in future studies. Research on this subject seems to be at a premature level in Greece but qualitative studies across Europe and USA on gender differences in bullying and victimization have yielded results similar to those found in correlational research. Mainly, this review denotes that Greece is still at an initial stage of research regarding bullying and victimization experiences among youth. Up to date, most of the data come from studies that do not focus exclusively on bullying and victimization or studies that are conducted with small opportunistic samples, in limited geographical regions.

Educational organizations could also publicize other successful bullying and victimization projects and highlight any positive changes in behaviour that occur to deal with or prevent bullying. We have little evidence that any specific project is more adequate of effective than others. Further development of this frame of reference, through research and examination of relevant theory, might yield a useful lens for evaluating anti-bullying projects and also point to areas where they may need additional development.

Conclusions

The essential role of the deployment of drama in education is highlighted in this research as a pedagogical tool that enhances students' level of engagement and supports them in building more explicit and deeper insights about bullying. In particular, the emotional and intellectual stimulation and reflection of students regarding bullying and their role as an integral part of the dramatic process by creating their own theatre pieces are also emphasized. This paper presents key findings and further analysis of gender differences in bullying and victimization among a sample of Greek early adolescents and possible change in bullying and victimization behaviour after co-creating and film participating. Students participated in co-creating and performing their own theatre pieces to produce three short video films about body shaming, racial discrimination, and cyberbullying.

Overall, findings imply that there is a significant difference in scores of bullying and victimization behaviour of boys and girls respectively before and after the completion of the project, while both reported more bullying and victimization behaviour before their active participation and less afterward. These findings indicate that anti-bullying programs may act as effective intervention and prevention programs capable of altering students' behaviour and reducing school bullying amongst children and adolescents. Furthermore, they may have considerable implications for practice regarding reducing, if not entirely preventing, the perpetuation of bullying behaviours through joint efforts of teachers, schools, education professionals, and policymakers. However, it should be taken into account that bullying behaviours may not manifest in the same way in all regions, communities, and schools and thus could inevitably determine the effectiveness of an anti-bullying program implemented. Therefore, the implementation of such an anti-bullying program should be accompanied by an initial assessment of the nature, frequency, and presence of bullying behaviour to develop targeted interventions that enclose the most effective and practical components and the most appropriate methods in bullying perpetration and victimization.

In conclusion, it would be useful and promising to consider carry out further research on analyzing the nature and impact of specific gender traits that determine the perpetration of bullying behaviour and different forms of victimization. Thus, we consider of utmost importance the continuance of gaining knowledge and experience in relation to gender stereotypical traits in adolescents aiming at developing efficient and targeted anti-bullying interventions.

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