

# **Bullying in Brazilian Schools and Restorative Practices**

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## **Abstract**

Bullying is a widespread phenomenon that affects many children and adolescents in Brazilian schools. A pilot research study was carried out in four schools (one private and three public) located in Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil. A combination of self-administered questionnaires and focus groups with students as well as interviews with teachers were undertaken to investigate the prevalence of bullying and how restorative practices can help to deal with conflict. Approximately 80% of the student participants in the study reported having experienced bullying in the school setting. Restorative practices implemented in these schools appear to contribute to the improvement of the school climate through reparative dialogue.

**Keywords:** Bullying, schools, culture of peace, restorative practices

## **Resumé**

L'intimidation est un phénomène largement répandu qui touche beaucoup d'enfants et adolescents dans les écoles brésiliennes. Une pilote de recherche-étude a été effectuée en quatre écoles (un privé, et trois publics), situé à Porto Alegre, RS, Brésil. Auto-appliqué des questionnaires et groupes de discussion avec les étudiants et d'entrevues avec les enseignants ont été entrepris pour enquêter sur la prévalence de l'intimidation, et comment les pratiques réparatrices peut aider à régler les conflits. Environ 80 p. 100 des étudiants ont connu l'intimidation à un moment dans leur vie dans ces écoles. Justice réparatrice pratiques mises en oeuvre dans ces écoles contribuent à l'amélioration de l'école climat grâce au dialogue.

**Mots-clés:** L'intimidation, écoles, culture de la paix, pratiques réparatrice

## Bullying in Brazilian Schools and Restorative Practices

### Introduction

Bullying is not a new problem, but it is often underreported and dismissed as a “playful joke” by education professionals (Grossi, Aginsky, & Grossi, 2010b). Media coverage and exploration of this phenomenon in professional literature has enhanced awareness of this problem. Concerns about bullying are emerging in the school system and workplace as students and staff recognize the importance of addressing this pervasive societal problem that causes severe damage in social relations (Silva, 2010), and it has been observed across all social strata and cultures around the world. Therefore, it is necessary to understand this phenomenon that has the potential to generate psychological scars for the victims’ entire lives.

One common characteristic of bullying is that it is often perpetrated by people who are known to the victim. Bullying can be expressed through verbal abuse (e.g., derogatory nicknames, cruel teasing, being picked on, humiliation), psychological abuse (e.g., discrimination, isolation, exclusion, ignoring, intimidation, harassment, terrorizing, tyranny, scaring), and/or physical abuse (e.g., beating, pushing, hurting, stealing, breaking and stealing personal belongings). Studies indicate that bullying may generate serious consequences including low self-esteem, suicide, and the perpetuation of the cycle of violence (Pepler & Craig, 2008).

Bullying is an English word that has been adopted in other countries and cultures meaning interpersonal intimidation. It is defined as “the conscious and deliberate desire to mistreat one person and put him/her under stress” (Debarbieux & Blaya, 2002, p.72). Pepler and Craig (1988) define bullying as “a form of aggression in which there is an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. The bully (or bullies) is (are) always more powerful than the victim (or victims). Bullying can be direct (face-to-face) or indirect (behind someone’s back). Indirect bullying includes exclusion and gossip” (p.1). Silva (2010, p.24) adds that bullying can be sexual as well. It takes the form of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexual comments concerning the victim. This sexual harassment can be made by one aggressor or by a group of students together. Another form of bullying is the cyberbullying that occurs by means of internet technology such as Messenger (MSN), Skype, Orkut, Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, cell phones, and other technologies. Usually, a fake e-mail is created in a relationship site, pretending to be another person with the only objective of intimidating, teasing, and defaming others.

Four factors contribute to the development of a bullying behavior:

- A negative attitude toward the child by parents or care-givers;
- A tolerant and permissive attitude toward aggressive behavior of the child and/or teenager;
- An authoritarian parenting style that uses power and violence to control the child or teenager; or
- A natural tendency of the child or teenager to be arrogant (Day, 1996, p. 44-45).

In Brazil, there are very few studies on bullying. One pioneer study was developed by ABRAPIA, the Multiprofessional Association for Protection of Childhood, in partnership with the Social PETROBRAS Program, which initiated a project in September 2002 dedicated to identifying bullying among students, establishing statistics of its prevalence, and implementing

anti-bullying policies. This project has been undertaken in 11 elementary schools in Rio de Janeiro, nine of which are funded by the city government and two of which are private. The survey, carried out by ABRAPIA in 2002 involving 5875 students from fifth to eighth grades in 11 schools of the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, revealed that 40.5% of these students admitted having been involved in bullying acts that year in which 16.9% were targets, 10.9% were both targets and perpetrators, and 12.7% were perpetrators only (ABRAPIA, 2007).

From 2006 to 2010, research projects were developed for the evaluation of the results of the implementation of restorative circles in schools, named “Justice Project for the 21st Century” with the support of Hope for Childhood/UNESCO. Four schools were selected based on criteria such as violent incidents registered in the Children’s Department in the previous year. These four schools have participated in a research study to evaluate the schools’ environment and the way in which conflict is addressed.

In this article, some of the results of this research will be shown to be related to the prevalence of bullying in schools and its consequences on students. In addition, the experience with restorative circles will be presented based on interviews with teachers and focus groups with students.

### **Review of the Literature**

Bullying is one of the most prevalent types of violence and yet is mostly ignored in the school system (Pepler and Craig, 2008), contributing to the intensification of conflict among students. Beaudoin (2006) stated that many schools do not admit the extent to which bullying occurs among the student body, opting to ignore the problem or refusing to attempt to resolve the issue. As a result, victims of bullying risk suffering deep emotional psychological sequelae, which might lead to losing interest in school, skipping classes, and leaving school prematurely. Under extreme situations, bullying may lead to serious self-harm or suicide and to breaking the law, committing crimes that include assault and homicide.

Although the current article focuses on bullying among children and teenagers, bullying occurs throughout the lifespan, and is called by other names (e.g., harassment, assault, child abuse, racism, and sexism) (Pepler & Craig, 2007). By addressing bullying in childhood, we can reduce future problems in adolescence and adulthood. Therefore, it is essential to intervene early in this problem that arises in the context of social relationships.

The most extensive research carried out in Great Britain on bullying showed that 37% of students in elementary school and 10% of those in high school admitted having been subjected to bullying at least once per week (Fante, 2005).

Boys are involved in all types of bullying with greater frequency than the girls both as targets and as perpetrators. Among female students, bullying is typically characterized by exclusion and defamation of character (Rolim, 2010; Simmons, 2004). Children who suffer bullying, depending on their individual characteristics and their living situations, may not overcome the traumas suffered from bullying experienced in school. Negative feelings might grow, especially low self-esteem, so that children and youth become adults with serious relationship problems. They may also adopt aggressive behavior themselves. Later on, they might suffer or practice bullying in the workplace (where it is commonly referred to as workplace harassment). In extreme cases, some might try to commit suicide (Fante, 2005; Pepler & Craig, 1988; Simmons, 2004).

To prevent bullying, we have to take into account the role that each student plays in the school setting. Whatever the student’s situation, some characteristics may be highlighted and

make some children more vulnerable to suffer bullying and others more prone to practice it. Constantini (2004) divide the students' roles into the following categories:

1. **Targets** of bullying include those who are victims of bullying;
2. **Targets/Perpetrators** of bullying are students who sometimes suffer and sometimes engage in the practice of bullying;
3. **Perpetrators** of bullying are those students who instigate and practice bullying;
4. **Witnesses** of bullying are those students who neither suffer nor practice bullying, but coexist in a setting in which bullying takes place.

The targets or victims are people or groups that suffer the consequences of others' behaviors and do not have the requisite resources, status, or ability to bring a stop to the harmful behaviour directed toward them. In general, they avoid interacting with others. Strong feelings of insecurity prevent them from asking for help. They are hopeless concerning their adaptation in a group. Their low self-esteem is exacerbated by critical interventions or the apparent indifference of adults toward their suffering. In schools, it is common for these students to receive advice to "just ignore the abuse, and it will cease". (Middelton-Moz, 2007; Grossi et al., 2010a).

According to Constantini (2004), some of the victims of bullying believe that they deserve what they get. They usually have few friends, are passive, quiet, and do not stand up against the aggression directed toward them. Many end up demonstrating poor academic performance that leads to resistance to going to school and even simulations of sickness to achieve this goal.

The witnesses, in most cases, ignore the violence, being silent towards it, fearing that they could be the next victims. Although they do not suffer direct violence, many are affected by it but are unsure of which position they should take. Some react negatively towards their violation of the right of study in a peaceful and secure environment. Witnessing bullying also negatively influences their capacity to succeed academically and socially (Rolim, 2010).

The perpetrators commonly are individuals who have little empathy for others' feelings or respect for their rights. Frequently, these individuals who bully belong to destroyed dysfunctional families in which there is little in the way of a positive affective relationship among family members. Their parents enact an authoritarian supervisory role over them, as well as tolerating and offering a violent model as a way to solve conflicts. Research has demonstrated that those who bully have a greater probability of becoming adults who engage in anti-social, violent, and/or criminal behavior (Fante, 2005).

When there are no effective interventions against bullying, there is a tendency to increase the hostility in the school environment. Therefore, it is necessary to make efforts to develop bullying prevention strategies. Bystanders have an important role in bullying prevention. If they do not intervene to stop it, they may reinforce it (Craig & Pepler, 2008). When some students observing bullying situations realize that the aggressive behavior does not result in negative consequences for those who practice it, they might be more likely to adopt similar behavior. Pepler and Craig (2007) proposed a "new binocular" (p. 2) on bullying. They argued that the traditional focus of research has been on the aggressive behavior of the child who was bullying and the need to protect the victimized child, with some attention to the bystanders. The research undertaken by Pevnet over the past 18 years showed that to understand and effectively address bullying, there is a need for a "binocular" view. According to Pepler and Craig (2007), with only one lens, the focus is limited to the individual needs of children

involved in all roles within bullying: those being aggressive, those being victimized, and those who are bystanders.

This singular view, however, falls short in providing a thorough understanding of the problem. By adding a second lens, as with binoculars, we expand the focus to include children's relationships. This second perspective takes into account the social dynamics in children's peer groups—and the roles that adults play in shaping children's experiences. Together, these two lenses offer a more comprehensive perspective on bullying problems. This deeper understanding of the complexity of the issues will lead us to recognize the multiple approaches required to address bullying problems. (Pepler & Craig, 2007, p.3-4)

Some of the cases reported by the mass media reflect the violent reactions of the victims of bullying. For example, there was an incident that took place on April 7, 2011 in Realengo, Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) involving a 23-year-old man, Wellington Menezes de Oliveira. He was a former student of the Municipal School Tasso da Silveira, who went into this school armed with two guns, pretending to be a lecturer. He climbed the stairs, entered a Grade 5 class, and started shooting at whoever was in his way. One of the boys was wounded but managed to escape and called two policemen. After being shot by the policemen, Wellington committed suicide. The tragedy resulted in 12 children killed, 10 girls and 2 boys between the ages of 12 and 14 years old. Prior to the shooting, the killer made a video exposing his reasons for the attack. He stated in the video that he suffered bullying in that school when he was 12 years old, and he was going to kill children as a form of revenge (Veja, 2011).

Some of the reactions concerning the situation involved in Realengo's High School deserve reflection:

1. After being bullied in this school when he was in the fifth grade, especially by girls who teased him, Wellington dropped out. He was a shy and an isolated student. He became depressed and withdrew contact from family and friends;
2. His target were not the students who intimidated or assaulted him, but Grade 5 students, especially girls, as a form of revenge because his former female classmates ignored his feelings and suffering.

Therefore, there is a gender-specific component in this bullying attack situation. The killing of students called the attention of government authorities who decided to invest in improving the security system in the school. However, other preventive measures must be also adopted by the school for controlling bullying that involve the students, teachers, principal, and family members in order to create a culture of non-violence in the school.

Among the practical strategies to build healthy relationships and prevent bullying in schools are: a) protect and connect children who are bullied (e.g., valuing the talents of the children who are bullied); b) turn children who bully from negative into positive leaders (e.g., offering alternatives to bullying such as being involved in an activity involving conflict resolution, watching a video about how bullying hurts followed by discussion, buddying smaller children, etc.); c) change bystanders into heroes (e.g., support them to intervene in bullying situations); d) change group dynamics; e) use "social architecture" to organize groups; f) stop bullying at the moment, g) be a role model, and so forth (Pepler and Craig, 2007, p.7). The use of "social architecture" in the organization of groups was exemplified by the

implementation of strategies created by teachers. They distributed different color tags to children from different ages, weight, and ethnic groups in the playground. The children have to play and socialize together in order to learn about diversity and non-discrimination, among others. In addition, by valuing children's differences and strengths, we shift the focus from the problem to the solution.

### **Restorative Circles: Strategies for Prevention of Bullying and for Promotion of a Culture of Peace**

One strategy to promote a culture of peace is the implementation of restorative circles in the school setting. First of all, it's important to bring the definition of culture of peace. According to the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace adopted in 1999 by United Nations and the 1998 UN resolution on the Culture of Peace: "A culture of peace is an integral approach to preventing violence and violent conflicts, and an alternative to the culture of war and violence based on education for peace, the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, respect for human rights, equality between women and men, democratic participation, tolerance, the free flow of information and disarmament." (Adams, 2010, p.1). For Adams (2010), "Education is the principle means of promoting a culture of peace ... The very concept of power needs to be transformed - from the logic of force and fear to the force of reason and love" (p.1).

In order to build a peace culture, there is the need that peace becomes the main principle that rules all social and human relations which include values, attitudes and life styles as well as the economic and legal structure. (Milani, 2003, p.31)

According to Maldonado (1997), it is essential to value relationships and recognize that conflict is natural and that it emerges from differences in ways of thinking and behaving. Teachers should not see conflicts as something necessarily negative, but also with the potential for something positive since they can broaden perspectives and enhance the social and cultural diversity in school. To build a peace culture in school is a slow process, and teachers, direction, students, and community should be open to dialogue and open to reviewing their own values, perceptions, and stereotypes. In order to prevent violence, we urge a shift to focus on identifying students' unfulfilled needs .

Building a culture of peace in schools demand efforts to change a punitive culture into a culture that recognizes diversity and differences in lifestyles, values, and behavior, as well as the corresponding institutional changes that promote mutual care, equal resources, and the general welfare of all people (Boulding, 2001).

This proposed shift implies the need to break down and eradicate the violent culture naturalized in schools as expressed in the following typical adolescent statement: "Fighting is like playing" (Grossi et. al, 2010). Freedom, responsibility, respect, commitment to social justice, and a culture of respect of human rights should be valued and incorporated in the family, the school culture, the administration practices of the school, the curriculum across all grades and school levels, the pedagogic process, and the external school community environment (Pranis, 2002).

Educators along with other professionals can help to build strategies to empower the students' personal and cultural identities, as well as stimulate reflections about universal values; environmental education; the sensibilization for ethnic and gender differences; and

other differences such as sexual orientation, religion, social class, and others in order to promote the collective sense of belonging. New ways of dealing with conflicts in the school environment implies a space for dialogue and peaceful conflict management.

To promote a culture of peace demands the reduction of poverty and the adoption of public policies that guarantee civil rights for minority groups. In order to live in peace and harmony, the individual has to fulfill his/her basic needs such as safety, education, housing, health, and employment, among others. Therefore, all the bullying prevention programs cannot take place in a vacuum. They need to interact with other systems such as welfare, health, education, justice, and so on in order to meet the demands of the children and families involved in a conflict. Without a network of support, we cannot break the cycle of violence and victimization, and we can inadvertently reproduce the oppressive practices that we're committed to ending.

Brazilian teachers and professionals undertook training on restorative practices, and started to implement restorative circles in the four schools involved in the research study as a non-violent conflict resolution strategy. This type of practice originated in Canada, New Zealand, and Australia.

Restorative justice is used in Canadian society to offer an alternative to the retributive formal justice system, particularly when Aboriginal persons are involved. In Canadian schools, the implementation of restorative practices is still relatively new when compared to other countries such as New Zealand and Australia (Morrison, 2005) Although there is very little research in this area, Brenda Morrison—a Canadian researcher who is currently a co-director of the Center for Restorative Justice and professor in the Faculty of Criminology at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia—suggests that restorative practice programs in schools are a “promising approach” to bullying (2005). In Brazil, the implementation of restorative practices in schools is also new, starting in São Caetano, SP in early 2000, and more recently, in Porto Alegre, RS, in 2005.

Morrison (2005) argued,

The practice of restorative justice in schools has the capacity to build social and human capital through challenging students in the context of social and emotional learning. While restorative justice was originally introduced in schools to address serious incidents of misconduct and harmful behavior, the potential this philosophy offers is much greater. The conviction is that the key challenge for schools is addressing the culture change required to make the shift from traditional discipline, driven by punitive (or rewards-based) external motivators, to restorative discipline, driven by relational motivators that seek to empower individuals and their communities. (p.335)

The circle process is used to support victims of bullying, to encourage the bullies to make amends and change behavior, and to determine how to best address the underlying problems (individual and community) associated with the wrongdoing. Circles in which decisions are made are open to all interested parties. Anyone may attend and anyone who attends will be able to speak and is expected to participate in decision-making. Opportunity to be heard and responsibility to contribute to a realistic, workable solution go hand-in-hand. Because decisions in the circle process are based on consensus, everyone in the process has an equal voice (Bazemore & Schiff, 2001). In the restorative circles carried out in Brazilian schools, this means that the teachers, the principal, the family, the student, or any participant of the community who attends will be part of the group without a “professional label.” Decisions

must be acceptable to everyone. Therefore, they must address the interests of everyone to some degree. Decisions or plans addressing the interests of all participants have a far greater likelihood of success because every participant has something to gain through the successful completion of the agreement. Consequently, every participant has a stake in success. This democratic process of decision-making contributes to the high rate of satisfaction (around 80%) among participants of restorative circles in Brazilian schools located at Porto Alegre, RS (Grossi, Aginsky, & Grossi, 2010).

Morrison (2006) presented the “theoretical understanding of restorative justice in the context of school bullying, particularly the interplay of students’ feeling of respect and pride for being a member within the school as well as the emotional value of being a school member” (p.372). In addition, she discusses the “role of shame management over harmful behavior” (e.g. bullying) to others within the school community. She argues that restorative justice and bullying have a “serendipitous fit” (Morrison, 2006, p.372), since bullying is “defined as the systematic abuse of power, and restorative justice seeks to transform the power imbalances that affect social relationships” (Morrison, 2006, p.372). Morrison (2006) points out that, by “strengthening the mechanisms of support and accountability within the community along with the mechanisms that promote healthy shame management, restorative justice seeks to empower those affected by harmful behavior to take responsibility and address the harm done” (p.372). Shame is perceived as positive in the restorative justice process because it is a way of connecting with the other person’s feelings, and a way of being accountable for the wrongdoing. However, this process should be permeated by respect for all the persons involved in the conflict. The act of bullying is condemned, but not the wrongdoer. Therefore, shame can play a role in the repair of social bonds because it is released instead of anger.

### **Methodology and Methods**

The study was conducted in four public schools in Porto Alegre, RS (Brazil). According to the State Department of Education, the public school system corresponds to 49.9% of the available institutions, serving nearly 263,430 students. The survey had a range of 14% of schools in the network. Three classes were randomly selected elementary school (fourth and seventh grade) and school (first grade). Only those students whose parents agreed to authorize such a procedure were enrolled in the study. Data collection was performed using a specific questionnaire that was applied to 113 elementary school students (from fourth grade to seventh grade) and another which was applied to 45 high school students (only students of first year) based on Fante (2005), and another self-applied questionnaire for 242 teachers. The questionnaires underwent pilot testing to check if the questions were clear to the respondents, and to make adjustments if necessary. Observation data were recorded in a field diary in detail. Considered an important research tool, the observation allows for the monitoring of important moments in school that are often not addressed in the questionnaires. We conducted four focus groups with 32 male and female students who had participated in restorative circles in the schools. We asked them about their understanding of bullying, the way school dealt with bullying situations, and how their participation in the restorative circles helped to deal with conflict situations such as bullying. In addition, we interviewed two teachers from each school who were circle coordinators (N=8) focusing on the types of situation brought to the circles, the process of doing the circle, the students’ feelings that arise when participating in a circle, and the perceived results from that experience in relation to the school climate. Similar



questions were asked to the students during the focus groups in order to be able to have different perspectives of the same experience, either from the standpoint of the student or from the teacher's standpoint.

### Research Results

Four schools participated in the pilot study, with 242 teachers answering a self-applied questionnaire about bullying. The number of respondents varied by school as follows:

Table 1.

*Number of teachers by school who filled out the questionnaire.*

School	Number of teachers	%
School 1	150	62
School 2	12	5
School 3	31	12
School 4	49	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	242	

All the teachers were invited to fill out the questionnaire. School #1 had most respondents. The participating schools have varied numbers of teachers, which explains the difference in the number of the respondents.

Table 2.

*Teacher's opinion concerning the problem of aggression and conflicts in the school environment.*

Opinion concerning the problem of aggressions and conflicts in schools (N=242)		
OPINION	Number of Teachers	%
Very important	186	76.9
Quite important	45	18.6
Relatively important	07	2.89
Of minimal importance	01	0.41
Of no importance	03	1.23

Ninety-five percent of the respondents considered it to be very important/quite important to have discussion about conflicts in schools. This reinforces the importance of implementing restorative circles as a non-violent conflict resolution strategy. In addition, Brazilian teachers who have received training on restorative practices were able to introduce some of the restorative justice principles (e.g. respect, honesty) and methodology in the classroom setting such as the dialogue in circle, emphatic listening, and non-judgment, among others.

Table 3.

*Teacher's opinion concerning the approximate percentage of time spent by them in dealing with issues related to discipline and conflicts in the classroom.*

Approximate percentage of time spent by teachers in dealing with issues related to discipline and conflicts in the classroom ( N= 242)		
Percentage of Time	Number	%
Less than 20%	74	30
Between 21 and 40%	83	24.2
Between 41% and 60%	48	19.8
More than 60%	29	11.9
I do not have problems of discipline	08	3.3

One of the factors that justifies this concern is the time the teachers spend dealing with discipline and conflicts issues in classroom as shown in the table above.

Table 4.

*Teachers' Opinions of Motivational Factors for Student Aggression.*

MOTIVATION FOR AGGRESSION	Number	%
Personality of the student	186	79.3
Status, social model	92	38
Racism, intolerance	81	33.8
Gender	57	23.9
Other factors	23	9.9
There are almost no aggressions	13	5.3

The teachers affirmed that 100% of the aggressions included verbal aggressions such as name-calling, threats, and offenses. In 86.3% of these situations, the verbal aggressions were followed by physical aggression. Other forms of aggression such as isolation, rejection, psychological pressure (laughing at, nagging) were present in 77.7% of the situations; theft, blackmail, property destruction were present in 20.6% of situations. Only 5.3% of the teachers did not identify relevant forms of aggression in school.

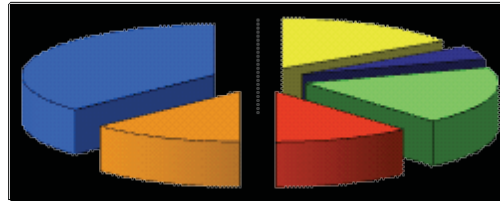
These were the most common answers of the teachers in order of prevalence (multiple choice options) concerning the factors that could contribute to the occurrence of aggressions.

Concerning the place where the aggressions and bullying among students take place, 205 teachers answered that the most common place that these type of conflicts occur is the playground during the intervals between classes (86.3% of the cases). The time of entering and leaving schools is also critical, as 47.3% of the bullying occur in this period of time, followed by the halls during the classes break in third place (43.9%) and 40% of the bullying incidents occurring in the own classroom with the presence of the teacher. Approximately 18% of the teachers answered that there is no specific place where the bullying occurs, as it can happen anytime and anywhere at school. 4.8% of the respondents perceived that the conflicts occurred most often in the specialized services of the school.

Of the 113 students from fourth and seventh grade who answered the questionnaire, over 25% of them revealed that they do not feel well at school. Almost 10% said that they feel very badly in the school environment. The main cause of fear was their own classmates (12.8%);

more than 10% were afraid of going to school. 8.9% of the students pointed out that they were afraid of the teacher and 5% reported the fear of the task as their major difficulty.

The main types of offenses according to the elementary school students are:



- Laughing at the other's expense
- Punching
- Hiding, breaking, and stealing belongings
- Treating the other with indifference
- Threatening
- Name calling, uncomplimentary nicknames

*Figure 1.* Common offenses among students of the four elementary schools in Brazil that participated in the study.

It was observed that in most cases the offender was a boy ( $n=42$ ), but there were a number of girls who also were offenders ( $n=30$ ), and there were instances of both acting together ( $n=13$ ). From students' perspective, the classroom is the most likely location for conflict, surpassing the bathroom, the playground, and the time of entering and leaving school. Based on this observation, we can conclude that the presence of a teacher is not a factor that prevents bullying from happening.

When students were asked about who they talk to when they have a conflict at school, they reported that the teacher is the last option selected. According to the students, the teachers try to deal with conflicts in the following manner:

Table 5.

*Elementary school students' opinions concerning the usual strategies used by teachers for dealing with conflicts at school Project Justice for the 21th Century.*

	<b>School 1</b> N= 35 (%)	<b>School 2</b> N= 37 (%)	<b>School 4</b> N= 41 (%)
Expelling the student from classroom	22 (62,8)	37(100)	19 (46,3)
Talking with the student alone	11(31,4)	01(2,7)	33 (46,3)
Placing the student apart from the rest of the classroom	01(2,8)	*	03 (7,3)
Sending to Orientation Educational Service or to the Dean	04(11,4)	*	09 (21,9)
Ignoring the fact	03 (8,6)	04 (10,8)	04 (9,7)

Among the respondents, 60 students have admitted that they have participated in the bullying episodes and 16.6% are estimated by their peers. In 75 % of the cases, there is no external intervention in response to the bullying situation. Only 8.4% of the students that witness bullying have disapproved the act and their first priority is to get away from the aggressor.

Among the students from secondary school, 45 were interviewed from two schools of the pilot project (one private and another public) from both genders and aged 14 and 18 years old, selected in an aleatory manner.

Around 30% of the students have felt lonely or rejected by their classmates in the last year. Usually, they choose to ignore when they were bothered by a classmate. The main forms of intimidation were offenses, nicknames, teasing, kicking, indifference, and gossip from their own classmates. The occurrence of bullying was higher in the private school.

One of the differences between the private school and the public school is where the bullying takes place. The victims of bullying in the public school revealed that in 75% of the bullying situations happen upon entering or leaving the school and in 25% of the situations, it happens in the classroom. In the private school it was pointed out the playground as the most common place for bullying to occur, followed by the classroom.

This study found that 70% of the students from secondary school try to get support from a classmate and that 30% of them seek help from the family. It was observed that students usually do not ask for help from a school's teachers, employees, or dean. This could be an indication that the school is not perceived as a source of support and empathic listening.

Of the students surveyed, 44% revealed that they have already bullied a classmate. Among those that have identified themselves as victims of bullying, 60% of them said that they have provoked the aggressor. The phenomenon of bullying therefore becomes a collective one, motivated by the incentive of the peers. Even though there is no explicit support for bullying, 4.6% of the students who witnessed bullying did not interfere with it in order to prevent it.

Table 6.

*Secondary School students' opinion concerning how they act in relation to bullying at school. Pilot Project Justice for the 21th Century, Porto Alegre, 2007.*

	School 01	School 03
<b>What do you do when a classmate suffers bullying?</b>		
I tried to interrupt the situation (n = 24)	14	10
I informed another person (n = 3)	02	01
Although I do not do anything, I feel that I should have done (n = 10).	06	04
Nothing, it's not my problem (n = 7).	06	01
I join the group who was provoking (n = 1)	01	*
<b>When you intimidate a classmate, how do you feel?</b>		
I do not intimidate anyone (n = 37)	23	14
I feel good (n = 03)	02	01
I feel admired by the classmates (n = 3)	01	02
I feel better than him (victim) (n = 1)	*	01
I do not feel anything (n = 1)	01	*

Bullying is often normalized and perceived as a form of playful interaction between peers (Grossi et al., 2010). The research process was carried out four focal groups, one in each school. There were two groups of eight students between the ages of 10-12 years old, one group with seven students, and another group with nine students between 14-16 years old. The statements below revealed the way the students experienced bullying at school.

- “There was a guy who used to call me fat. I do not like that”
- “I talked to a girl who was defaming me at school”
- “There is a group of boys who are always playing of fighting, and they are known for that”
- “The girls are the ones who bully more”
- “Usually the fights are because of boyfriends.”
- “One wants to be more than another”
- “Girls and boys do not play together”
- “There are more little groups between girls than between boys”

Bullying affects boys and girls from different social classes. Although research has shown that the main perpetrators of physical bullying are boys, the girls usually prefer other forms of bullying such as psychological bullying that involves exclusion and defamation of the classmate.

In our study, 70% of the situations dealt within the circles were related to bullying while the remainder addressed situations were school property damage, name-calling directed at the teacher, stealing the teacher's belongings, drug trafficking, and slamming doors, among others. The following statements reflect the way students experience the restorative practices within school:

- “I felt respected”

- “I felt listened”
- “I felt more calm”
- “Everybody thinks it’s cool. It helps to solve the conflicts. It is good. You make peace after a fight.”
- “We get together. We can say everything in a restorative circle, and everybody has a say, give an opinion. The teachers give advice, and we discharge our feelings. The circle that I participated in the last year, I was invited. The girls had a fight, then they talk about it in the circle, they regret what they did, and they worked it out the conflict.”
- “By dialoguing, we are able to understand each other. Then, the circle helps to solve the conflict.”
- “Sometimes, the person wants to fight, but when we talk, we calm down, the anger decreases.”
- “I think that restorative circle helps, because I could be a much worst person if I have not participated in all these restorative circles. I’m a person who easily loses control. I’m still like that, but I never got involved in fights anymore.”

The restorative circle involves the participation of the school community, including parents, guardians, social workers, and others who have been affected by a conflict situation occurred within the school. A restorative justice circle is proposed to try to solve the problem. In this situation, a formal circle coordinator is indicated, and a written agreement signed by both parties (victim and bully) takes place at the end of the restorative circle. A follow-up circle can be held months later to verify if the agreement was completed, and to check the level of satisfaction with the restorative process. Decisions or plans addressing the interests of all participants have a far greater likelihood of success, because every participant has something to gain by successful completion of the agreement. Consequently, every participant has a stake in success. This democratic process of decision-making contributes to the high rate of satisfaction (around 80%) among participants of restorative circles in Brazilian schools located at Porto Alegre, RS (Grossi, Aginsky, & Grossi, 2010).

Among the positive outcomes of restorative justice practice within the schools are reductions in behavioral referrals to the principal’s officers and in suspensions, integration of restorative values in the interaction with students, and improvement of the school environment, among others (Grossi et. al., 2010). The teachers from Porto Alegre’s schools also experienced positive feelings towards the restorative circles based on these excerpts from interviews:

- “Here is different from other school that I worked. After I learned about this new way to deal with a conflict, things are getting better. I started to change, use more dialogue with the students. I used to yell with them.”
- “In the circle, we had the intention to minimize conflicts, try to pacify the setting, it is a learning process in the school. It always works!”
- “The circle made me look at the whole situation as an educator. In the circle, the student was able to express the situation she was facing at home. She was living an edge situation of abandonment and she exploded in school. Sometimes this happens with us, educators, we explode with them. We could deal with the conflicts in other ways... It was a very special moment (the circle), a very beautiful moment, I confess, very rewarding.”

In Canada, restorative practices within schools are also bringing positive outcomes to the way teachers and school personnel are dealing with conflicts as well. The Safe Schools Action Team published a document for the Ministry of Education about the safe schools policy in Canada. In this paper, one example of a successful practice using the restorative justice process can be found in the Waterloo District School Board in Waterloo, Canada. The program is designed to enhance interpersonal skills and develop empathy in students who are involved in school violence. "This model allows those most directly involved to be part of a healing process to meet the needs of the affected individual and provides the student with an opportunity to examine how one's actions have impacted others ... By listening and facing the situation, the student can develop a sense of empathy and a willingness to take corrective action and accept responsibility" (IIRP, 2009, p.35). Restorative practices are also used as a tool in classroom management by teachers and support staff (Ontario, 2006; Smith, 2008). Another example of a successful experience using restorative practices can be found in the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, in Ontario, Canada. They started a pilot project in four elementary and secondary schools in the summer of 2004. The experience was considered so positive that the Board expanded these practices to 95 elementary and secondary schools. Another best practice in restorative justice applied to Canadian schools mentioned in this report from the International Institute of Restorative Practices can be found in the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board, Ontario. The school's Board changed the culture of no-tolerance policy to a restorative policy. As a result, the number of suspensions have fallen from 1,850 involving 892 students between 2003 and 2004 to 501 involving 330 students in the 2007-2008 period (IIRP, 2009, p.25).

### **Conclusions**

This article shows that restorative practices can be implemented in schools both in Brazil as well as in Canada as an alternative to conflict and violent situations associated with bullying. Informed practice guided by the evaluation research is the best ingredient for a successful intervention. Furthermore, tackling the bullying phenomenon requires a cultural change both in Brazil and in Canada that embodies respect of diversity and human rights. This change can be fostered by building restorative practices and other actions directed to a culture of peace. The experiences with restorative practices both in Canadian and Brazilian schools demonstrate that teachers learn other ways to solve conflicts between students rather than applying suspensions or sending students either to the Dean's office or State Children's Department. Through dialogue, students were able to learn about empathy and respect, and they could benefit from education on the values, attitudes, modes of behavior, and ways of life. This experience will enable them to resolve any dispute peacefully and in a spirit of respect for human dignity, tolerance, and non-discrimination. The implementation of restorative circles in Brazilian schools, stimulated other measures to promote a culture of peace and non-violence in the school setting. This can be exemplified by the involvement of children and adolescents in activities designed to instill in them the values and goals of a culture of peace. Among them, were: a) the cooperative games; b) a group of theater involving adolescents focusing on their reality; c) a music group to develop their abilities and capacities; and d) the activities for parents and student's during the weekends to increase the participation of the family in the student's school life, among others. The learning achieved with the restorative circles and these other activities helped them to promote a healthier and peaceful school environment.

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