

THE EFFECTS OF AN ANTI-BULLYING BIBLIOTHERAPY INTERVENTION ON CHILDREN'S ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

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ABSTRACT: *Although minimal research supports bibliotherapy in specifically reducing bullying, researchers and practitioners often recommend children's books and stories to address this topic. The aim, of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an anti-bullying bibliotherapy intervention on primary school children's bullying behavior and victimization, participant roles, attitudes towards bullying, intentions to intervene in bully-victim problems, perceived efficacy of intervening and actual intervening behavior. An experimental pre-test/post-test design was used. The sample consisted of 98 pupils drawn from the fifth grade classrooms of four primary schools in central Greece. Data were collected using self-report measures, before and immediately after the intervention. The results indicated that the programme contributed to a positive reduction in 'outsider' behaviour and enhanced students' pro-victim attitudes and self-efficacy for intervening in bully/victim incidents. The results are discussed in terms of their implications for anti-bullying interventions.*

KEYWORDS: Bibliotherapy, Bullying, Victimization, Intervention, Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools has been recognized as a serious and complex worldwide problem with many negative short-term as well as long-term effects on children's psychosocial adjustment (Pozzoli, Ang & Gini, 2012). Bullying is a form of physical, verbal or social aggression that consists of repeated use of force against peers over extended periods of time. It includes name-calling, threatening, teasing, hitting and exclusion (Olweus, 1993). Reported rates indicate that between 15% to 30% of schoolchildren are either bullied or bully others (Bibou-Nakou & Markos, 2013).

Initial efforts to tackle bullying and victimization mainly focused on individual determinants of children's psychosocial problems (Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2000). However, the individualistic approach to bullying, (i.e., anger management training, assertion training, advice to victims or potential victims etc.) does not necessarily enable us understand the maintenance of bully/victim problems since bullying is not only a personal matter, but a complex social issue as well. Analyzing bystander behavior in bullying situations has shown that schoolchildren may exhibit a number of typical bullying-situation behavior patterns which maintain bullying behavior rather than discourage or prevent it (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). For instance, some children (a) join in the bullying when someone has started it and act as assistant of the bully (assistants), (b) others provide the bully with positive feedback (reinforcers), or (c) remain uninvolved and thus silently approve of the bullying (outsiders), while fortunately, there are also a minority of students probably who comfort and stick up for the victim (defenders).

According to Salmivalli's analysis (1999) conceptualizing these typical bullying-situation behavior patterns as (social) roles may have a number of important implications in anti-bullying intervention efforts. If we are to help an individual (i.e. the bully) change his/her typical behavior in the group, we should be able not only to motivate the individual and provide him/her with the necessary skills, but also to make other group members encourage that change. Thus, in tackling bullying, one should try to target all participant roles (Andreou, Didaskalou & Vlachou, 2007; Pozzoli, Ang & Gini, 2012; Sutton & Smith, 1999) and encourage them to see what they are doing, what consequences that might have, and how changing their behavior and expectations might help change the situation.

A few recent studies have examined the contribution of children's attitudes to their participant role behaviors in bullying situations (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). These studies have found significant associations between students' attitudes on the one hand and the extent to which they bully their peers on the other hand (Boulton, Karelou, Lanitis, Manoussou & Lemoni, 2001; Rigby & Johnson, 2006). This small but growing set of findings suggests that students' attitudes concerning bullying and their actual involvement in bullying are associated congruently (Pozzoli, et al., 2012). In the study undertaken by Salmivalli & Voeten (2004), bullying-related attitudes were associated with all participant role behaviors in expected ways. Defending the victims and staying outside bullying situations were both related to anti-bullying attitudes, while the opposite was true of bullying others, as well as assisting or reinforcing the bully. Similarly, Rigby & Johnson (2006) found that positive attitudes toward the victims were one of the most important predictors of expressed intention to intervene. Accordingly, Boulton, et al., (2001) found that Greek students who expressed the most anti-bullying attitudes were least likely to believe that bullying can have positive effects and reported least bullying.

In light of the above, many researchers argue for a complimentary approach to the delineation of bullying as a phenomenon that should be viewed as part of the individual's general framework of attitudes in interpersonal relationships. In this way, a child who shares attitudes supportive of bullying may be expected to also hold competitive and manipulative attitudes. This observation has surprisingly received little attention in empirical work, despite the important implications such a focus has for interventions (Andreou et al., 2007).

On the whole, it is significant to focus on the attitudes and behavior of the peer group itself. Although most students are generally aware of bully-victim problems and agree something should be done, few actually react against peer aggression. The evidence of the study carried out by Stevens et al., (2000) revealed anxiety among peers that they might lose social influence and be bullied themselves as well as lack of ability to handle bully-victim problems in an effective way, addressing the special attention that should be placed to students' perceived efficacy in dealing effectively with bully-victim problems in order to develop a more protective social environment. Drawing from the social cognitive principles of behavioral change, prospect interventions should focus upon students' attitudes, group norms and perceived efficacy and intention to deal with bullying more effectively.

Results of this short of intervention seem to be very promising (Andreou et al., 2007; Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Voeten, 2005) suggesting that schools could tackle bullying more effectively by focusing on two critical ingredients: the overall social tolerance for bullying and the need for effective problem-solving strategies, particularly for victims and bystanders (Craig, Pepler, & Biais, 2007; Davis & Davis, 2007). To this end, bibliotherapy holds

promise as a potential tool to strengthen positive, supportive, and inclusive classroom environments, in particular educating and involving bystanders in more actively supporting victims (Crothers & Kolbert, 2008; Jack & Ronan, 2008).

However, the body of research investigating the effectiveness of bibliotherapy is not extensive, nor is it integrated with the massive body of bullying research (Jack & Ronan, 2008). *Bibliotherapy* is simply defined as “The use of reading to produce affective change and to promote personality growth and development” (Hebert & Furner, 1997, p. 169) and has received increased attention recently (e.g., Brewster, 2008; Paparoussi, Andreou, & Gkouni, 2011; Sullivan & Strang, 2002). It has been supported that bibliotherapy can be helpful for students who are experiencing difficulties or who may be likely to encounter problems similar to those discussed in contemporary literature for children and young adult readers (Forgan, 2002).

Since the 1980s schoolteachers have started using bibliotherapy in order to help students cope with common problems in their everyday life (i.e., conflicts, death etc.), handle their feelings (i.e., first love, envy, anger, fear), boost their self-confidence and gain self-awareness (Branch & Brinson, 2007; Jack & Ronan, 2008). In addition, it seems that all children can benefit from being taught a literature bibliotherapy lesson at a preventive level because students are likely to encounter similar issues during their school years (Paparoussi, et al., 2011). For example, a student may not be confronted by a bully or teased today but may experience similar problems later. Moulton, Heath, Prater & Dyches (2012) argue that reading carefully selected bully-themed stories with children offers a cost effective and quick strategy to initiate conversations about bullying and helps teachers strengthen bystander support for victims and builds proactive efforts against bullying. However, this argument has not been supported by empirical evidence, yet. Bibliotherapy has proven effective in treating aggression (Shechtman, 1999; 2000) in clinical contexts but its impact on bystanders when applied in classroom settings is still unknown.

The process of classroom bibliotherapy is often described as “developmental bibliotherapy” because it focuses on helping children cope with developmental needs rather than relying on a clinical or individualized approach to bibliotherapy (Doll & Doll, 1997). Through this developmental process, students are likely to experience identification with the main character in the story, experience a catharsis and release of emotion, and develop insight to solve their problems (Paparoussi et al., 2011). In other words, students may share their own experiences and problems, express repressed feelings without intensifying their mental tension and realize that other people face similar problems to their personal ones. Although minimal research supports bibliotherapy in specifically reducing bullying, researchers and practitioners often recommend children's books and stories to address this topic (Beane, 2005; Henkin, 2005; Kriedler, 1996; Olweus, 1993).

Moreover, many anti-bullying interventions include bibliotherapy in their activities but the effectiveness of bibliotherapy on its own has never been evaluated by empirical evidence, because it is often used as a small part of broader anti-bullying programmes and activities. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of an anti-bullying bibliotherapy intervention on primary school children's bullying behavior and victimization, participant roles, attitudes towards bullying, intentions to intervene in bully-victim problems, perceived efficacy of intervening and actual intervening behavior. If we are to help an individual (i.e., the bully) change his/her typical behavior in the group, we should not only motivate the individual and provide him/her with the necessary skills, but also ensure that other group

members encourage that change. Thus, in tackling bullying, we should try to target all participant roles (Andreou et al., 2007; Sutton & Smith, 1999) and encourage all participants to see what they are doing, what consequences that might have, and how changing their behavior and expectations might help change the situation. To this end, developmentally appropriate literature that addresses the topic of bullying and relates to children's lives may lead to changes in attitudes and behavior, by strengthening core prosocial messages, empowering students to actively take a stand against bullying and promoting desired social interactions.

METHOD

Sample and Design

An experimental pre-test/post-test design was used. Pre-test results were obtained in December 2011 and post-test was executed at the end of the same school year (May 2012). Questionnaires were administered by the research group in a 50-minute session during a regularly scheduled class period.

The sample consisted of 98 pupils (50 control -23 boys and 27 girls- and 48 experimental -26 boys and 22 girls) drawn from the fifth grade classrooms of four primary schools in central Greece (mean age = 10.29, S.D. = 0.62).

Classes were assigned to the experimental and control groups on the basis of teachers' willingness to be involved directly in the intervention. Normal procedures of consent and confidentiality were followed during data collection. Parents were informed and gave their permission for study participation (for both the intervention and evaluation phases). No children were excluded from the study due to parental objection.

The intervention program

The program was embedded within the wider curriculum of the fifth grade classrooms and consisted of twenty instructional hours that were implemented within approximately a two-month period. The intervention took place twice or three times a week. The program was implemented by two classroom-teachers in two different classrooms. The teachers involved had received specific training, after the school day, by the researchers. The aim of teachers' training was twofold: first to raise their awareness of the bullying problem and its seriousness and second to familiarize, actively engage and raise their self-efficacy in implementing particular anti-bullying curricular activities based on developmental bibliotherapy.

Developmental bibliotherapy was incorporated into the literature lesson. This approach was thought to be the best way to help children gather accurate and reliable management techniques in the most subtle and nonthreatening way. To increase the potential for students to identify with story characters, the selected story matched student characteristics and the specific nature of bullying situations. In particular, we used the short story "Froxylanthi's flag", written by Dikaiou (2008), which presents a fictional incident of school bullying. In particular, a young girl, Isidora, is presented to be frequently bullied by one of her classmates, Elina, whereas the schoolteacher and the other students do nothing to oppose the inappropriate behavior of the reinforcer. It is not until one student of that class, who is also the narrator of the story, reveals the truth that something starts changing. Multiple variables such as the characters' gender and age, types of bullying, characters' role in bullying (i.e.,

bullies, victims, bystanders), adults' role in the situation, coping strategies, etc. were considered.

During the first meeting students were asked to identify their thoughts about school bullying after watching a short relevant video. In the following meetings children read the story fragmentary and participated in group activities such as role playing, discussions, brainstorming, etc. (see, Cornett, 1999). Specifically, they were asked to write in their diaries how they spent their day at school, pretending to be particular characters of the story. Hence, they played a part of those characters during a drama activity. Prompted by the story they had read, they approached the mental and emotional world of the reinforcer, the victim, the defender and the outsider. In addition, students tried to define school bullying by highlighting the aspects of the phenomenon. Commonly, they shared relevant incidents they had experienced as victims, outsiders- or even as reinforcers- (e.g. tease someone for his appearance, reinforce someone to do something etc.) and they were invited to identify incidents of bullying at their school, in order to realize that this is a common phenomenon that cannot be ignored. In addition, they edited creative writing activities about the impact of the passive role of the outsiders on the perpetuation of the phenomenon and they discussed how they can cope with such incidents when they are in the place of the victim. In fact, they were engaged in relevant role playing activities.

Follow-up activities were designed (a) to recall the main story line; (b) target characters', feelings, values and attitudes; (c) help children understand how the main character dealt with the problem; (d) inform the school community and the local society about the phenomenon of bullying; (e) evaluate the solutions selected and suggest alternative solutions to problems as needed.

Measures

All children completed the 'Peer-victimization Scale' and the 'Bullying Behavior Scale' (Austin & Joseph, 1996). The 'Peer-victimization Scale' consists of six forced items, three of which refer to being the victim of negative physical actions (i.e. hit and pushed, picked on, bullied) and three of which refer to being the victim of negative verbal actions (i.e. teased, horrible names, laughed at). For each item, participants were presented with descriptions of two kinds of children, ones with high victim behavior and ones with low victim behavior; participants indicated which of the two kinds of children they resembled more and then indicated whether this choice was *really true* or *sort of true* for them. Responses were scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with higher scores reflecting greater victimisation. The item pool of the 'Bullying Behavior Scale' was based on the 'Peer-victimization Scale' and involved changing the tense of the item from passive to active. Therefore, the 'Bullying Behavior Scale' consists of six forced items, three of which refer to being the perpetrator of negative physical actions (i.e. hit and pushed, picked on, bullied) and three of which refer to being the perpetrator of negative verbal actions (i.e. teased, horrible names, laughed at). For each item, participants were presented with descriptions of two kinds of children, ones with high bullying behavior and ones with low bullying behavior; participants indicated which of the two kinds of children they resembled more and then indicated whether this choice was *really true* or *sort of true* for them. Responses were scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with higher scores reflecting greater bully behavior. The maximum possible score for each scale was 24 and the minimum 6.

In addition they completed a shortened version of the 'Participant Role Scale' (Salmivalli et al., 1996) which was presented as a self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 16 behavior descriptions (see, Andreou & Metallidou, 2004) in each of the following roles: a) Assistant (active but more follower than leader-like – 5 items), b) Reinforcer (inciting the bully, providing an audience etc. – 2 items), c) Defender (sticking up for or consoling the victim – 5 items) and d) Outsider (staying away, doing nothing in bullying situations – 4 items). Items were structured and scored similarly to those on the 'Bullying Behavior Scale' and the 'Peer-victimization Scale'. Responses were again scored on a scale of 1 to 4, with higher scores reflecting greater assistant, reinforcer, defender and outsider behavior respectively. The maximum possible score that children could obtain on the assistant reinforcer, defender and outsider scales are 20, 8, 20 and 16 and the minimum 5, 2, 5 and 4 respectively. Reliability of the six role in bullying measures was satisfactory (Cronbach's alphas: Bully a .81, Victim a .83, Assistant a .78, Reinforcer a .69, Defender a .79 and Outsider a .70).

Participants' attitudes towards bullying and victimization were measured by the 9- item 'Pro-bully Scale' and the 7-item 'Pro-victim Scale' respectively, constructed by Stevens, et al. (2000) for use with primary school students. The questions of the Pro-bully Scale reflected sympathy for bullies (e.g. 'Students who bully others just do it for fun') and a perceived weakness of victims (e.g. 'Students who are bullied gain in strength'). The Pro-victim Scale combined questions referred to empathy for children who are bullied (e.g. 'Students who are bullied feel sad about it') with a positive attitude to supporting the victims of bullying (e.g. 'Students who intervene in bullying incidents are brave'). All questions had the same response alternatives ranging from 'totally disagree' (1), to 'unsure' (3), to 'totally agree' (5). Cronbach's alpha for the 'Pro-bully Scale' was .73 and for the 'Pro-victim Scale' .74.

In addition, they completed three more scales (Stevens, et al., 2000) measuring: a) intention to intervene in solving bully-victim problems (intention scale), b) personal efficacy to intervene in bully-victim incidents (self-efficacy scale) and c) their involvement in solving bully-victim problems (behavior scale). Each of these scales consisted of three questions which had the same response alternatives ranging from 'totally disagree' (1), to 'unsure' (3), to 'totally agree' (5). The first scale contained items referred to students' intention to: a) seek teacher's help, b) react against bullies and c) support victims of bullying, the second items reflected students' self-efficacy to: a) support victims of bullying, b) react against bullies and c) seek teacher's help, and the third, items concerning intervening in bully-victim incidents by: a) supporting victims of bullying, b) reacting against bullies and c) seeking teacher's help. Cronbach's alpha for the intention scale was .69, for the self-efficacy scale .67 and for the behavior scale .71.

RESULTS

A preliminary analysis was carried out to compare the experimental and control samples at Time 1 (pre-test). No significant differences emerged between the two samples in relation to bullying behavior, victimization, participant roles, attitudes towards bullies and victims, intention and self-efficacy to intervene and rates of intervening. Therefore the two samples were comparable.

Significant correlations were observed between scores on the 'Pro-bully' scale and scores on 'Victim', 'Bully', 'Reinforcer' and 'Assistant' scales ($r=.32$, $r=.33$, $r=-.41$, and $r=.37$,

respectively, $p < .01$ in all cases) and between the 'Pro-victim' and the 'Defender' scales ($r = .48$, $p < .01$). Higher scores on 'Defender' scale were associated with higher scores on 'intention' and 'self-efficacy' to intervene ($r = .39$, and $r = .47$ respectively, $p < .01$) and 'intervening behavior' ($r = .28$, $p < .05$), while higher scores in these measures were associated with lower scores on 'Reinforcer' ($r = -.42$, $r = -.41$, and $r = -.33$, respectively, $p < .01$ in all cases) 'Assistant' ($r = -.32$, $r = -.43$, and $r = -.38$, respectively, $p < .01$ in all cases) and 'Outsider' ($r = -.49$, $r = -.33$, and $r = -.36$, respectively, $p < .01$ in all cases) scales. Thus, the results suggest that changes in attitudes towards bullies and victims, intention and self-efficacy to intervene and rates of intervening may affect participant roles but also changes in participant roles may have an impact on these variables.

Table 1. Means and (SDs) of bullying behavior, victimization and participant roles for experimental and control groups from Time 1 to Time 2 (before and after the intervention).

Measure	Time 1 (Before)	Time 2 (After)	Change score	t
Bully				
Experimental				
Control	[N=50] 10.09 (3.18)	[N=50] 10.06 (3.10)	-0.03 (3.14)	-.149
	[N= 48] 9.83 (3.60)	[N=47] 10.38 (3.80)	0.55 (3.70)	-3.676*
Victim				
Experimental				
Control	[N=50] 10.34 (3.43)	[N=50] 10.61 (3.12)	-0.27 (3.11)	-.329
	[N=48] 10.60 (3.53)	[N=47] 11.12 (3.73)	0.52 (3.21)	-.480
Reinforcer				
Experimental				
Control	[N=50] 8.47 (2.84)	[N=50] 8.42 (2.74)	-0.05 (2.78)	.177
	[N=47] 8.56 (3.04)	[N=47] 9.04 (3.19)	0.48 (3.15)	-7.545**
Assistant				
Experimental				
Control	[N=49] 3.02 (1.40)	[N=50] 2.88 (1.44)	-0.14 (1.42)	.561
	[N=48] 2.96 (1.50)	[N=48] 3.00 (1.35)	0.04 (1.44)	-.312
Outsider				
Experimental				
Control	[N=49] 8.97 (2.68)	[N=49] 8.00 (2.54)	-0.97 (2.59)	-7.628**
	[N=47] 8.16 (3.26)	[N=48] 8.72 (3.39)	0.56 (3.33)	.194
Defender				
Experimental				
Control	[N=50] 16.54 (3.48)	[N=49] 16.14 (3.37)	-0.40 (3.43)	-1.938
	[N=48] 15.94 (3.50)	[N=47] 15.68 (3.70)	-0.26 (3.60)	.627

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

The means and standard deviations of bullying behavior, victimization and participant roles for the two groups before (December 2011) and after (May 2012) the intervention are shown in Table 1. Mean change scores were calculated by subtracting the Time 1 score from the corresponding Time 2 score, according to the procedure proposed by Menesini, et al. (2003). Separate independent t tests were conducted to compare the scores of the experimental and control groups. The data was screened for normality and homogeneity of variance. These

assumptions were met in all cases and therefore non-parametric alternative tests were not used.

From the results in Table 1, it is evident that there was not an overall statistically significant decline in self-reported bullying behavior and victimization for the experimental group after the intervention, although a slight decrease was observed. Significant results were found for the experimental group in the 'outsider' and for the control group in the 'bullying behavior, and 'reinforcer' scales. From examination of the change scores and the means it can be seen that there was a significant decrease in 'outsider' scale for the experimental group and a significant increase in 'bullying behavior' and 'reinforcer' scales for the control group. No significant differences were observed between Time 1 and Time 2 in 'Assistant', and 'Defender' scales for either the experimental or the control group.

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of attitudes towards bullies and victims, intention and self-efficacy to intervene and rates of intervening. Separate independent t tests were conducted again to compare the scores of the experimental and control groups and data was screened for normality and homogeneity of variance. Mean change scores were calculated in the same way as in the case of bullying, victimization and participant roles. From the results in Table 2, it is evident that there was a significant increase in 'pro-victim' and 'self-efficacy for intervening' scale for the experimental group and a significant decrease in 'intervening' scale for the control group. No significant differences were observed between Time 1 and Time 2 in 'Pro-bully', and 'Intention' scales for either the experimental or the control group.

Table 2. Means and (SDs) of 'Pro-bully', 'Pro-victim', 'Intention', 'Self-efficacy' and 'Behavior scales' for experimental and control groups from Time 1 to Time 2 (before and after the intervention).

Measure	Time 1 (Before)	Time 2 (After)	Change score	t
Pro - Bully				
Experimental				
Control	[N=50] 19.17 (3.53)	[N=50] 19.02 (3.73)	-0.15 (3.21)	.642
	[N= 48] 19.24(3.65)	[N=48] 19.65 (3.72)	0.41 (3.36)	.333
Pro -Victim				
Experimental				
Control	[N=50] 19.96 (2.06)	[N=49] 22.23 (0.91)	2.27 (1.48)	8.398**
	[N=48] 21.71(3.78)	[N=48] 21.67 (3.68)	-0.04 (3.47)	.929
Intention				
Experimental	[N=50] 11.51 (2.77)	[N=50]11.62(2.89)	0.11 (2.83)	-.312
Control	[N=48] 11.23 (2.70)	[N=48]10.99 (2.82)	-0.24 (2.76)	.923
Self-efficacy				
Experimental				
Control	[N=50] 10.84 (2.59)	[N=50] 11.50 (2.28)	0.66 (2.31)	3.010*
	[N=48] 11.30 (2.60)	[N=48] 10.39 (2.90)	-0.91 (2.29)	.329
Behavior				
Experimental	[N=50] 11.74 (2.56)	[N=50] 11.85 (2.22)	0.11 (2.39)	.727
Control	[N=48]11.72(2.29)	[N=47] 10.36(3.01)	-1.13 (2.65)	7.192**

*p<0.05 **p<0.01

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to document the results of a short-term longitudinal anti-bullying programme that was based on the participant approach to bullying (Salmivalli, 1999) and principles of developmental bibliotherapy (Doll & Doll, 1997; Durlak & Wells, 1997). The study examined whether the intervention was effective in terms of altering self-reported bullying behavior and victimization, students' attitudes towards bullying, intentions to intervene in bully-victim problems, perceived efficacy for intervening and actual intervening behavior.

According to the findings of the study the program works effectively contributing to a positive reduction in outsiders' role and enhanced students' positive attitudes towards victims and self-efficacy beliefs for intervening in bully/victim incidents. The findings related to the role of outsiders are particularly relevant since this role decreased in the experimental group, whereas the role of reinforcers (those who provide the bully with positive feedback) increased in the control group. The above results, in combination, provide some important information about the program and its effectiveness. The intervention had a positive effect on the experimental classes, preventing the increase of reinforcers reported in the group that did not receive the intervention while, the role of outsiders was reduced. Although outsiders mainly remain uninvolved in bullying episodes, through their presence and attention to those involved, they silently approve of the bullying. Our short-term intervention was able to break the conspiracy of silence by raising students' awareness about their contribution either directly or indirectly to the maintenance and increase of bullying. However, we cannot argue that those who were outsiders before the intervention became defenders afterwards. Further research is needed in order to determine what makes some children defend the victims or remain uninvolved, and also how their skills could be used in prosocial ways to combat bullying.

Additionally, the findings that related to the change in students' attitudes and efficacy beliefs to intervene may develop a new dynamic in the peer group and this in turn, may reduce bullying within and outside the classroom. This emerging dynamic can utilize peer-group power against bullying by encouraging responsibility in solving conflictual interactions with peers and children's perceived efficacy for intervening in bully-victim incidents.

However, it should be noted that the magnitude of our bibliotherapeutic intervention was small. The intervention had a positive effect on the experimental classes, preventing the decrease of reported intervening behavior reported in the group that did not receive the intervention, but it was not successful in converting anti-bullying attitudes into actual intervening behavior and making students react against bullies. As Salmivalli & Voeten (2004) maintain, changing attitudes might be a good start, but not enough to successfully intervene in school bullying. Those children who are passive bystanders during aggressive interactions may hesitate to intervene because: 1) they may be unsure of what to do; 2) they may fear retaliation; and 3) they may worry about causing greater problems by responding in the wrong way (Hazler, 1996). If these are the primary reasons for the infrequency of peer interventions in bullying, then we must provide training in appropriate strategies to intervene safely and effectively (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig 2001).

Hawkins, Pepler and Craig (2001) also argue that peers can help but they need to be taught the appropriate conflict mediation skills, particularly for direct interventions with children who are bullying others. For example, the anti-bullying programme developed by Andreou and her colleagues (2007) recommends teaching children how to help victims through creative problem solving, seeking adult help, joining with the victim and developing empathy for victims. To this end, developmental bibliotherapy could be more effective when combined with other activities and techniques (Hillsberg & Spark, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The evidence from this study indicates that there is still much to learn with respect to peer interventions in bullying. The programme restrictions already mentioned have to be viewed within the limitations underpinning curriculum-based class work alone in general and not as constraints related only to the implementation and effectiveness of the present programme in particular. Another restriction underpinning the effectiveness of classroom-based intervention programme in general, that is also applicable to our case, concerns the limited coordination researchers are able to exercise over the delivery of curriculum-based activities by teachers themselves in the classroom. The ways the curriculum-based activities included in our programme were presented to students depended heavily on teachers' personal commitment to the project, their attitudes and intentions towards the intervention and on various restrictions that broader curriculum demands and scheduled objectives might have placed upon the time available to be invested in the intervention activities. In some previous studies, the degree of implementation of the programme has actually been evaluated and the findings suggest that the effectiveness (or lack of it) of an intervention programme may be due to the implementation process itself (Andreou et al, 2007). These findings suggest that for assessing the effectiveness of prospective anti-bullying interventions within the Greek educational context, the degree of actual programme implementation measures should be incorporated in the evaluation models and techniques employed.

Although our results cannot be generalized, they suggest an interesting line of research for future investigation. Additional research will be needed to fully describe the transactions between children and literature and to understand the effects of those transactions on both bullying reduction and social development.

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