ANTI-BULLYING GAMES. THE PERCEPTION OF PORTUGUESE TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS

JOGOS ANTIBULLYING. A PERCEÇÃO DOS PROFESSORES E EDUCADORES PORTUGUESES

JUEGOS ANTIBULLYING. LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS PROFESORES Y EDUCADORES PORTUGUESES

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this study is to verify if the teachers of the first Cycle of Basic Education and the childhood educators, in Portugal, consider the use of specific games to prevent bullying as pertinent. The study involved 276 first cycle teachers and 276 early childhood educators of both genders. The instrument used is a questionnaire inspired by Olweus (1989), although adapted by the author to the adult population of the study. Analysis of the results shows that most teachers and educators believe that it is pertinent to initiate bullying prevention during preschool education. One part knows at least one type of instrument or protocol to act in cases of bullying, in the institution where they work, and most defend the use of the playful nature of games as a preventive and sensitizing strategy in the early levels of formal education. The information obtained encourages the use of primary bullying prevention measures through the recreational dimension. When the game is well planned and tested, it is a tool that helps the developing of children's knowledge and skills, enabling them to gain autonomy and learn to respect the rules, providing moments of motivation, communication and positive and correct attitudes towards others.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE:
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jogo

RESUMO: O objetivo deste estudo procura verificar se os professores do primeiro ciclo da Educação Básica de Portugal e os educadores de infância consideram pertinente o uso de jogos específicos para prevenir o bullying. O estudo envolveu 276 professores do primeiro ciclo e 276 educadores da infância de ambos os sexos. O instrumento utilizado é um questionário inspirado no de Olweus (1989), embora adaptado pela autora à população adulta do estudo. A análise dos resultados mostra que a maioria dos professores e educadores acredita que é pertinente iniciar a prevenção do bullying durante a educação pré-escolar. Uma parte conhece algum tipo de instrumento ou protocolo para atuar em casos de bullying na instituição em que trabalha e a maioria defende o uso da natureza lúdica dos jogos como estratégia preventiva e sensibilizante nos primeiros níveis da educação formal. As informações obtidas incentivam o uso de medidas de prevenção primária do bullying através da dimensão recreativa. Quando o jogo é bem planeado e testado, é uma ferramenta que ajuda a desenvolver o conhecimento e as habilidades das crianças, permitindo-lhes adquirir autonomia e respeitar as regras, proporcionando momentos de motivação, comunicação e atitudes positivas e corretas em relação aos outros.

PALABRAS CLAVE:
bullying
maestros
educadores
prevención
juego

RESUMEN: El objetivo de este estudio intenta comprobar si los profesores de primer ciclo de Enseñanza Básica de Portugal y educadores de infancia consideran pertinente el uso de juegos específicos para prevenir el bullying. En el estudio han participado 276 profesores de Primer Ciclo y 276 Educadores de Infancia de los dos géneros. El instrumento utilizado es un cuestionario inspirado en el de Olweus (1989), aunque adaptado por la autora a la población adulta del estudio. Del análisis de resultados se desprende que la mayoría de los profesores y educadores opina que es pertinente comenzar la prevención del bullying durante la enseñanza infantil. Una parte conoce algún tipo de instrumento o protocola de actuación para casos de bullying en el centro donde trabajan y la mayoría defiende el uso del carácter lúdico de los juegos como estrategia preventiva y sensibilizadora en los primeros niveles de educación formal. Las informaciones obtenidas animan el uso de medidas de prevención primaria del acoso escolar a través de la dimensión lúdica. Cuando el juego está bien planificado y testado constituye una herramienta que ayuda a desarrollar el conocimiento y habilidades de los niños permitiendo al mismo tiempo que adquieren autonomía y respeten las reglas, proporcionando momentos de motivación, comunicación y actitudes positivas y correctas ante los demás.

1. Introduction

In order to know the meaning of a word, one must first look for its origin. In this sense, after consulting the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (1989), it was found that a bully, which is the source of the term bullying, is «a person who uses his or her power or power to frighten or hurt those who are weaker» (p.149)[1]. Referring to the APA Dictionary of Psychology (Vandebos, 2007), the concept of *bullying* takes the meaning of «persistent threatening and aggressive behavior directed at people, especially those who are smaller or weaker» (p.139).

In 1993, Olweus defined the concept of *bullying* by stating that «a person is being bullied when repeatedly and over time exposed to negative actions by one or more people», while Ramirez (2001) designates it as an aggressive, intentional and harmful form of conduct, whose protagonists are young students (including children at an earlier age). According to Sharp & Smith (1994), *bullying* is a systematic abuse of power, a deliberate and continuous form of aggressive, peer behavior. According to Pereira (2002), the theme is defined «by aggressive behaviors that intimidate the other and that result in violent practices by an individual or by small groups, with regular and frequent character» (p.16), following this line of analysis.

Aggressiveness is identified by the intention of hurting someone who is the target of the aggressive practice (Pereira, 2008).

According to Cowie & Jennifer (2008) «a literature review suggests that teachers and students have much more definitions of *bullying* than those used by researchers, especially children (eg Guerin & Hennessy 2002; Smith *et al.* 1999)» (p .15). In a survey of 225 teachers and 1820 high school students who sought to investigate definitions of *bullying*, Naylor *et al.* (2006) found that only 18% of teachers and 8% of students included repetition of bullying behavior in their responses. In addition, only 25% of teachers and 4% of students included intent to harm, while nearly three-quarters of teachers mentioned strength imbalance as a criterion in their definitions, while only 40% of students did so (Cowie & Jennifer 2008).

As a worldwide problem, *bullying* can occur in any school and is not restricted to any specific school. School is therefore one of the main contexts, in these current days, where bullying is most felt, since it is a place where many children come together.

Nowadays, authors are increasingly investigating the *bullying* phenomenon, especially what happens in schools among students (Pereira, Silva & Nunes, 2009) and which corroborate its existence. In Portugal, a study conducted with a

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sample of 200 students in public schools in the urban and rural areas of the north of the country (Pereira, Almeida, Valente & Mendonça, 1996) found that 21% of students reported having been beaten by colleagues and 18% say they have had aggressive behavior. In this sense and given its complexity, it is considered that it will be pertinent to draw up effective and diversified prevention methods.

Carvalhosa (2008) constructed a model for the relationship between *bullying* and the perception of social support, in representative national samples of Austrian, Lithuanian, Norwegian and Portuguese students. Results showed that for Portugal and within school, compared to those not involved in *bullying*, victims and/or bullies reported lower levels of social support from their colleagues, and bullies and /or victims reported lower levels of social support from their teachers. Outside school, victims reported lower levels of social support from friends and bullies reported lower levels of social support from their family than those not involved in bullying situations. Also, other authors (Formosinho, Taborda & Fonseca, 2008) correlated involvement in *bullying* situations with other forms of antisocial behavior (Carvalhosa, 2009).

In this sense and given its complexity, it is considered that it will be pertinent to draw up effective and diversified prevention methods. For the prevention of violence and indiscipline in schools, Amado & Freire (2002), three fronts of action were identified: primary prevention (intervention by anticipation), secondary prevention (early intervention); and tertiary prevention (intervention in the case of persistent cases). Having the objective of using games in the prevention of *bullying*, it is considered that the playful aspects associated with the pedagogical / educational present in the games are important strategies for teaching and in the present case for primary prevention.

Since ancient times and as far as it has been possible to search through literature research, games have gained an extremely important role for the development of children, helping them in their learning process. In this way of thinking, it is important to understand the connection between education and game concepts. Both terms have acquired different meanings due to the different conceptions built on childhood over time. Allué (2000) reinforced the idea of the importance of the role of games, both for physical development and intellectual development, hence being considered essential in childhood and gaining a character of gratuity, pleasure and joy making it acquire more meanings such as: relationship, having fun and learning. Rubin *et al.* (1983) refers to the

game as a «behavioral disposition that occurs in contexts that can be described and reproduced, manifesting through a set of observable behaviors» (p.698). With the use of the game, the child explores the world in which he or she is inserted by engaging physically and socially.

In Jean Piaget's view (1978) games not only function as a hobby, but also contribute to children's socialization, intellectual and cognitive development. Through this activity, they acquire autonomy, learn to respect the rules, as well as it helps them in the organization and development of their personality, similarly, in the opinion of Erikson (1974), the game should be linked to the social and emotional development of children. According to Dollabona & Mendes (2004) reasoning, the terms «play» and «learning» end up being synonymous with each other, since both create a space to develop thinking, to establish social proximity, to develop skills, knowledge and creativity. The dynamics between these two concepts further reduce excess of self-centeredness, help develop solidarity and empathy. Taking advantage of educational games can serve as an alternative to learning, as they will emerge as a balance in terms to acquired values.

Regarding *bullying*, Neto (1997) reinforced the importance of studying aggressive and violent behaviors so the intervention programs can be created through gambling. Thus, exposing the words of Campos (2010), games «are an invitation for interaction, with the ability to seduce and introduce good habits to children» (p.128), which can be seen in this context, as the ideal instrument to combat the problem that is *bullying*. According to Dallabona & Mendes (2004): «If properly applied and understood, playful education can contribute to the improvement of teaching, whether in the qualification or critical formation of the student, or to redefine values and to improve the relationship of people in society» (p.2). Regarding primary prevention, this study aimed to investigate whether primary school teachers and early childhood educators in Portugal consider the use of games to prevent *bullying* as pertinent.

2. Methodology

Participants

276 teachers of the 1st cycle of basic education participated in this investigation, being 89.9% (248) women and 10.1% (28) men. The average age was 43.56 years old with standard deviation of 8.77 years, highlighting that it was found that the values recorded between men and women were very close. 276 kindergarten teachers, being

97.5% (269) women and 2.5% (7) men, with average age of 41.35 years with standard deviation of 10.45 years for the women, while the average age of kindergarten male teachers was 38.43 years with standard deviation of 7.91 years. This choice was made based on the simple random method and the convenience method. Initially, several elements were randomly extracted from the reference population and were fixed as effective in this sample (Albarello, *et al.* 1997).

Instrument

The data collection instrument used was a survey[2]. For this purpose, the research author constructed two questionnaires, one for elementary school teachers and another for kindergarten teachers, based on Olweus (1989), with questions aimed not at children but at the adults targeted by this research and determined by its objectives. While formulating the questions, it was taken special measures to ensured that the questions were clear and relevant, with appropriate vocabulary for the participants.

The constructed instrument consists of three question blocks: block 1, which consists of 4 questions related to personal data; block 2, with 14 questions about the knowledge of teachers and educators about bullying; block 3, consisting of 6 questions about the prevention of *bullying* and the use of games as a tool for its prevention.

The questions of the survey were considered essential to evaluate what was intended and for its application, ethical and deontological principles of confidentiality were followed.

Procedures

For the application of the questionnaires it was necessary to resort to the convenience procedure, through the disclosure on social networks and sending letters to National Associations of Teachers and Childhood Educators requesting the collaboration for disclosure of them, their associates and thus finding a sample necessary for the research. Note also that 15% of the questionnaires were self-administered. The convenience method has the advantage of being fast, cheap and easy (Hill & Hill, 2009). Thirty-one participants served as elements for the pretest of the administered questionnaire in order to detect any possible error or difficulty, subsequently some adjustments were made.

The application of the questionnaires was performed in two phases, from July to October 2017 the pre-test questionnaires were applied, subsequently from November 2018 to August 2019 all questionnaires intended for investigation and data, were applied. The results obtained were tabulated and analyzed using SPSS, version 24.0, program and later described and discussed.

3. Results

When asked about their knowledge of *bullying*, all respondents said they had heard of *bullying*. Therefore, teachers and early childhood educators were asked to rate their knowledge on the subject. Most teachers, 61.2% (169) said they knew the phenomenon well and 30.1% (83) said they knew bullying very well. However, 8.7% (24) of respondents reported having little knowledge on this subject. Regarding the data obtained from early childhood educators, 23.2% (64) stated that they knew the phenomenon well, 23.2% (64) said they knew *bullying* very well. However, 16.7% (46) of respondents reported having little knowledge on this subject. Regarding the characterization of the participants' experience and training with the *bullying* phenomenon, in view of the results, it was concluded that the majority of the teachers surveyed, 56.5% (156) experienced *bullying* in their childhood or youth, and it happened to the 56.2% (151) of the kindergarten teachers surveyed.

Given the results obtained, only 23.2% (64) of the teachers stated that they had studies on this issue in their academic formation, in contrast to the 33.0% (91) of the kindergarten teachers. On the other hand, 37.0% (102) of the teachers already had training on the phenomenon as a professional and of these, 73 said that the training answered their questions. Of the 174 teachers who had never been trained about *bullying* situations, 69.0% stated that they already felt the need for such training, while only 29.0% (80) of the early childhood educators said they had already been trained, and 62 said that the training responded to their doubts. Of 196 educators who had never been trained in *bullying*, 63.8% said they felt the need to do so.

Most of the teachers and kindergarten teachers participating in the study, 92.0% (254), considered that *bullying* is currently a concern in schools.

Regarding the perception that teachers and kindergarten teachers surveyed have about primary prevention of *bullying*, most teachers, 96.0% (265) and kindergarten teachers 98.9% (273) defend that «*bullying* prevention is pertinent in preschool education»: just as 95.3% (263) of teachers and 99.3% (274) of kindergarten teachers considered «advantageous that primary prevention of *bullying* begins in preschool education». Similarly, the majority, 97.5% (269) of the teachers and

kindergarten respondents defended that «it is pertinent to have professional training on *bullying* in schools».

Regarding the existence of any instrument / protocol of action / signaling for possible occurrences of *bullying* among children in the school where they work, 33.3% (92) of the teachers said yes, in contrast to 19.9% (55) of the early childhood educators.

Teachers and kindergarten teachers were asked to characterize school-based prevention of *bullying*. Most teachers, 55.43% (153), while 35.9% of kindergarten teachers, stated that «it is a phenomenon visible in schools but in terms of primary prevention there is still much to be done». At the same time, 33.70% (93) of teachers and 47.8% (132) of early childhood educators reported that «primary prevention exists in schools but needs to be strengthened /improved for it to be effective».

Regarding the understandings of teachers and early childhood educators on combining playfulness with education as a primary prevention and sensitization tool for children, most teachers, 96.01% (265) and early childhood educators 96.4% (266) agreed that combining playing (didactic games) with education could work as an instrument for primary prevention and sensitization of children, both in pre-school education and in the 1st cycle of basic education, for this problem.

Finally, it's presented the intersection of the results obtained from first cycle teachers and early childhood educators about their understandings. By crossing the answers and the chi-square independence test, it was intended to determine the possible association between the understandings of the professionals under study. Table 1 explored the self-evaluation about bullying, having experienced this phenomenon as a child, as well as the training received and viewed *bullying* as a problem of concern in schools.

Table 1. Crossing the understanding of teachers and educators about bullying knowledge, experience and training

Variable		Profession		Total	Chi-square test
		1st cycle teacher	Kindergarten teacher		
		n(%)	n(%)	n(%)	ET(p)
Bullying Knowledge Assessment	I know very well	83(30,1)	64(23,2)	147(26,6)	9,397 (**0,009**)
	Know well	169(61,2)	166(60,1)	335(60,7)	
	I know little	24(8,7)	46(16,7)	70(12,7)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	
Experienced the phenomenon in youth	Yes	156(56,5)	155(56,2)	311(56,3)	0,007 (0,932)
	No	120(43,5)	121(43,8)	241(43,7)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	
In academic training he studied the phenomenon	Yes	64(23,2)	91(33,0)	155(28,1)	6,539 (**0,011**)
	No	212(76,8)	185(67,0)	397(71,9)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	
As a professional I was trained	Yes	102(37,0)	80(29,0)	182(33,0)	3,967 (**0,046**)
	No	174(63,0)	196(71,0)	370(67,0)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	
Bullying is a problem in schools today	Yes	254(92,0)	271(98,2)	525(95,1)	11,254 (**0,001**)
	No	22(8,0)	5(1,8)	27(4,9)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	

n - observed absolute frequency; % - relative frequency; ET - test statistic; p- proof value

Most of the teachers, 61.2%, as well as most educators, 60.1%, stated that they knew the phenomenon under analysis well. However, at a significance level of 1%, it was concluded that the profession is statistically associated with the evaluation of *bullying* knowledge, (χ = 9,397; *p* = 0.009), since first cycle teachers reported to know very well the phenomenon than what was theoretically expected, as well as more educators than expected, to state that they know little of this phenomenon.

Regarding the possible experience of professionals in childhood / youth, very similar results were observed between elementary school teachers and kindergarten teachers, so by the chi-square test it was concluded, at a significance level of 5%, that the experience of the phenomenon

in the past was statistically independent of its current activity.

Regarding the study of the phenomenon during the academic formation, it was observed that the majority of teachers, 76.8%, stated that this did not happen, as did the majority of educators, 67.0%. It was found that most teachers did not have academic training about the phenomenon as well as educators. This justifies the statistically significant association between the profession and the study of *bullying* during the course (χ = 6,539; *p* = 0,011).

Regarding *bullying* training as a professional, it was observed that most of the first cycle teachers and most of the educators stated that they did not have it. However, 37.0% (102) of teachers said they already had and 29.0% (80) of educators as

well. Given the imbalance between the observed number of teachers and educators that have been trained in terms of *bullying* during their professional activity, it was concluded by the chi-square test, (χ = 3,967; p = 0.046), that the variables were statistically associated.

Regarding the fact that *bullying* is a worrying problem of the current days in schools, it was observed that 92.0% of elementary school teachers said yes, as well as 98.2% of kindergarten teachers. By the chi-square test, (χ = 11,254; 0,00 = 0,001), it was concluded that the activity performed was statistically associated with the understanding of this aspect, and the educators were the ones who stood out.

Table 2 shows the intersection of the understanding of teachers and early childhood educators about primary prevention of *bullying* in the institution where they worked. In this sense, it was observed that most teachers, 96.0%, like most educators, 98.9% stated that they considered the primary prevention of *bullying* to start in preschool education as pertinent.

However, at a significance level of 5%, it was concluded that the profession is statistically associated with the evaluation made on this issue, (χ = 4,690; 0,0 = 0.030), since more early childhood educators were observed to defend such fact than first cycle teachers.

Table 2. Crossing the understanding of teachers and educators about primary prevention

Variable		Profession		Total	Chi-square test
		1st cycle teacher	Kindergarten teacher		
		n(%)	n(%)	n(%)	ET(p)
Considers primary prevention relevant	Yes	265(96,0)	273(98,9)	538(97,5)	4,690 (**0,030**)
	No	11(4,0)	3(1,1)	14(2,5)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	
Considers it advantageous for prevention to begin in preschool	Yes	263(95,3)	274(99,3)	537(99,3)	8,292 (**0,004**)
	No	13(4,7)	2(0,7)	15(2,7)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	
Do you think it is appropriate to have training for professionals	Yes	269(97,5)	269(97,5)	538(97,5)	0,001 (**0,999**)
	No	7(2,5)	7(2,5)	14(2,5)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	
Combining the playful with education with prevention instrument	Yes	265(96,0)	266(96,4)	531(96,2)	0,050 (0,824)
	No	11(4,0)	10(3,6)	21(3,8)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	
What best characterizes prevention in your school	It's all undone	24(8,7)	29(10,5)	53(9,6)	23,349 (**0,000**)
	It's done enough	6(2,2)	16(5,8)	22(4,0)	
	Increasingly visible phenomenon	153(55,4)	99(35,9)	252(45,7)	
	Primary prevention	93(33,7)	132(47,8)	225(40,8)	
	Total	276(100)	276(100)	552(100)	

n - observed absolute frequency; % - relative frequency; ET - test statistic; p- proof value.

Regarding the fact that it is advantageous for primary prevention of *bullying* to start in pre-primary education, it was noted that most teachers, 95.3%, said yes, as did most, 97.5%, of kindergarten teachers. It has been found that educators are defending this advantage more than teachers, which justifies the statistically significant association between the profession and the answer to this question (χ = 8,292; p = 0.004).

Regarding the pertinence of the existence of training for *bullying* professionals in schools, very similar results were observed among first cycle teachers (97.5%) and kindergarten teachers (97.5%). It was concluded, at a significance level of 5%, that the identification of this relevance was statistically independent from the activity currently performed.

When it comes to combining playing and education as an instrument for primary prevention and children's sensitization, very similar results were observed between first cycle teachers (96.01%) and early childhood educators (96.4%). Chi-square concluded, at a significance level of 5%, that the opinion on this aspect was statistically independent from the activity currently performed.

Regarding what best characterized prevention in the institution where they currently work, it was observed that 55.4% of teachers and 35.9% of kindergarten teachers stated that «this phenomenon is increasingly visible in schools but in terms of prevention, much remains to be done». On the other hand, 33.7% of teachers and 47.8% of educators agreed that «primary prevention exists in schools, but it must be strengthened / improved to have better effects». Given the imbalance between the opinions of teachers and educators, it was concluded by the chi-square test, (χ = 23,349; p = 0.000), that the professional activity performed was statistically associated with the prevention and characterization performed in the workplace.

4. Analysis of Results

In this research, it was found that all teachers and kindergarten teachers interviewed, knew well the phenomenon of *bullying*, and this perception is added by the fact that the majority still know the phenomenon very well. In a study conducted by Silva (2014), teachers revealed that they know *bullying*, which meets other findings in the literature. However, another study by the same authors, conducted in a public school in Brazil, revealed that teachers know *bullying*, but incompletely. They also added that they are not prepared to deal with this complex phenomenon, which is in line

with what was mentioned by some of the participants in this research, when they said that they have little knowledge about this subject, while contradicting the majority who say they knew a lot. The phenomenon, in this line of thought, can also be noted that although no studies have been found in the literature, any study on the perception of early childhood educators regarding *bullying*, with regard to teachers, is the one carried out at the Federal University of Minas Gerais, where it was found that about half of the teachers could not give information about whether or not students were bullied (Silva, *et al.,* 2017a). In another study by the same authors (2017b) conducted with 17 teachers from five public schools in São Paulo, it was concluded that only 17% of teachers were aware of *bullying*, with theoretical and critical knowledge about the forms of production of the phenomenon.

Regarding training on the issue of *bullying,* although some respondents have taken approaches during academic and vocational training, a large percentage of teachers and early childhood educators have never been trained in *bullying*. Yoon & Bauman (2014) show that teachers are not efficiently prepared to cope with *bullying*, while concluding that most teachers recognize the need to address how to intervene in *bullying* situations. The authors add that there are few programs that provide teachers with adequate training and when this happens, they tend to focus on theoretical information.

In a study by Silva *et al.* (2013), the teachers approached report that situations of school violence are complex and therefore require more comprehensive and articulated interventions. Silva & Rosa (2013) also highlight the need to review initial and continuing teacher training programs to be able to act more effectively in the face of challenges of school violence, in particular, *bullying*. They also add that debates and lectures are insufficient for intervention. New research is needed in the training institutions to review the adopted models. In this context Oliveira (2012) adds that teachers, faced with various forms of school violence and without adequate training and specialized guidance, become powerless in dealing with conflict manifestations, while failing to act effectively. Studies also reveal that teachers feel powerless in the face of acts of violence in the school environment, being aware that their actions are ineffective, mainly because they have not been adequately trained in the area of the problem. Eyng's study; Gisi & Ens (2009) is an example of these conclusions when it comes to processes of teachers' education to challenge the construction of various competences in teachers, aiming to

transform them into agents promoting dialogue, knowing how to value diversity in an egalitarian perspective.

Most respondents considered *bullying* an increasingly worrisome problem in schools, in this sense they agree that it is pertinent and advantageous for its prevention to begin in pre-school education. Although scarce or even nonexistent, studies on primary prevention of *bullying* from pre-school education emphasize that it should be considered as a first field to intervene in the prevention of *bullying* in the school context. If in terms of 1st cycle a lot has been said about *bullying*, about what happens in the preschool context, little has been studied. Noteworthy here is the study by Crick, Casas & Ku (1999) conducted with preschool children and another study by Kishimoto (2001), also covering the same audience.

The relevance of having training for professionals on *bullying* in schools is defended by all respondents, in line with the literature that proposes the expansion of actions aimed at teachers' education, especially with regard to conceptual training, with the purpose of strengthen the vast theory, fundamental and necessary to tackle *bullying* in the school environment. Studies also reveal that when teachers have little awareness of the phenomenon, there is no place for a pedagogical intervention and much less to overcome the problem in the school environment (Silva *et al.,* 2017). Researchers such as Neto (2005); Martins (2005); Botelho & Souza (2007); Pereira; Silva & Nunes (2009); Pereira *et al.* (2011) and Fisher *et al.* (2012) demonstrated that to prevent the phenomenon of *bullying* it is necessary to involve the whole school community. Interventions at school involving intersectoral actions, in accordance withstudies are more effective (Smith; Rigby & Pepler (2004); Pereira; Silva & Nunes (2009); Pereira *et al.,* (2011).

For Winslade, *et al.* (2015) schools can deal with *bullying* by encouraging counselors, teachers and principals to play a transformative role rather than accepting this phenomenon.

Regarding the existence of an instrument / protocol of action / signaling for possible occurrences of *bullying* among children in the educational establishment where the respondents perform functions, it appears that it exists, which does not happen in schools in some countries, such as refer Silva *et al.* (2013) in a study conducted in Brazil, specifically in the city of Uberaba, demonstrated the absence of a school project to combat *bullying* and the lack of articulation between professionals.

In line with what the literature points out, the 1st grade teachers and kindergarten teachers who participated in the study, given the response options proposed in the questionnaire, mentioned being aware that the phenomenon of *bullying* is increasingly visible in schools, but in terms of primary prevention, there is still much to be done because, although it does exist, it needs to be strengthened/improved to be effective.

Regarding the relevance of combining playing and education as an instrument for primary prevention and raising children's awareness of the problem of *bullying*, it was found that both 1st cycle teachers and early childhood educators advocate the alienation of play (school games) to educated both in pre-school education and in the 1st cycle of basic education for the problematic, which goes against what was defended in the 18th century by Rousseau and Pestalozzi when they emphasized the importance of games as a formative instrument, according to what was found in a bibliographic review.

Although researchers over time have been more concerned with dramatic playing and symbolic playing in children's cognitive development, and although some actors point to the emergence of educational games in the 16th century, studies by Kishimoto (2003) have found that the first studies around them are in Greece and Rome. Research carried out in the early twentieth century varies in intensity according to the political and social contingencies of each era, but in the 1970s the psychological studies on children's play, stimulated by Jean Piaget (1971), resurface.

More and more authors are currently investigating the *bullying* phenomenon, especially with regard to schools. There are also several studies on the perception of first cycle teachers about this phenomenon (Smith, 2004; Neto 1997; Pereira, Silva & Nunes, 2009), but studies on the perception of early childhood educators regarding the problem and those related to playing games as a prevention of *bullying* are barely visible. However, in Portugal the work conducted by Marques (2017) with children of the 1st cycle of the physical education area, which consisted of research over a year in the school playground with the aim of distinguishing between fighting and *bullying* in this space, through the games they played during this period of fun. For elementary school teachers, many fighting games turn into serious situations, and this opinion, according to Sharp & Smith (1994), is based on the few cases in which this happens. For most children, only 1% of fighting games become serious fighting (Smith *et al.,* 2003).

Studies, although unpublished, appear in the literature review to meet the importance of using educational games as a strategy to reduce violence in schools allowing children to work

cooperatively, develop critical thinking and know how to solve problems.

Complementing this view, Tesani (2004) defends that playing is essential as a pedagogical resource, because playing articulates theory and practice in the child, formulates hypotheses and experiences, making learning attractive and interesting.

Playing games is an important role in the cognitive, affective and social formation of children so that, through it, it is possible to enable their socialization and integration into society.

5. Conclusions

Studies on *bullying* are not recent, the first one was in 1982 by Dan Olweus in Norway. This issue continues to concern all institutions and the whole of teachers, kindergarten teachers and parents. It's extremely complex, and it takes on very specific forms that must be understood in order to intervene. In this sense, teacher's training is fundamental, as it is those who can most easily prevent and detect this problem in schools, even if this requires initial and ongoing training and at the same time with the support of society as a whole.

Strech (2004) emphasizes the importance that we should all have in the prevention of *bullying*, emphasizing the importance of the performance of parents, educators and teachers. It is not enough to know and criticize the problems of society, it becomes relevant to act actively by betting on primary prevention with regard to the phenomenon of *bullying*. Assuming that playful activities are extremely important in the lives of children, in addition to contributing to their development, they may also play a major role as a tool for preventing *bullying*.

We may then wonder about the relevance of using didactic games for the primary prevention of *bullying*, and more specifically, in preschool education. While it is urgent to move to primary intervention to prevent and reduce *bullying*, it is necessary to create tools to facilitate this increasingly relevant and complex task.

The use of games, as an educational resource, starts from the Renaissance (Kishimoto, 2003), the examples found in the literature review about the positive results obtained through the application of games in the construction of knowledge and in the development of global education. By encouraging motivation, reasoning and argumentation between teachers and students, reinforced the belief of its importance as a strategy not only for the teaching and learning of concepts but also for the contribution of primary prevention of *bullying* and more specifically through of the use of educational games.

Analyzing the data of the present research, the main conclusions are the unanimity of the participants in claiming to know the phenomenon of *bullying*, although there are more teachers who know it well and kindergarten teachers claiming that they know little, at the same time. Teachers have not been trained as much as educators during the course about the phenomenon but that is a worrying problem of the present time and more specifically in schools.

When referring to the primary prevention of *bullying* in the institution where they work, teachers and early childhood educators considered it pertinent and advantageous for prevention to begin in pre-school education, although teachers argued further for such facts, as well as the existence of training on *bullying* in schools. Regarding combining playing and education as a primary prevention and awareness-raising tool for both pre-school and primary education, both considered that it could work as a prevention tool.

Finally, *bullying* has been found to be an increasingly visible phenomenon in schools, but in terms of prevention, much remains to be done, and although it exists, it needs to be reinforced/improved for better effects.

In view of the foregoing, the effort of this investigation is so that the game can gain space not only as a learning tool, but also as an educational tool for the primary prevention of violence and most often *bullying*.

Notes

[1]   Author's free translation.
[2]   Questionnaire built by Cátia Vaz to identify the understanding of early childhood educators and 1st cycle teachers about the phenomenon of bullying and its primary prevention through playing, within the PhD thesis in Social Sciences, Faculty of Social Sciences, University from Salamanca.

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