Bullying and Unhealthy Psychological Atmosphere in Classroom

Dr. Aravinthan Nagaratnam[1], Lavanya Aravinthan[2]

[1]Lead Consultant, Educational Management
[2]Educator, TESL

Abstract

In the realm of education, the classroom symbolizes intellectual exploration and youth development. Unfortunately, bullying mars this ideal, pervading the social and emotional fabric. This pervasive issue, spanning verbal abuse to cyberbullying, demands a nuanced understanding. Beyond individual impacts, bullying disrupts group dynamics, hindering collaborative learning. A holistic approach is imperative to reclaim the classroom as a fear-free space for academic growth.

Keywords: Classroom, Bullying, Education, Psychological Impact, Collaborative Learning.

Introduction

In the hallowed halls of education, the classroom stands as a bastion for intellectual exploration and the nurturing of young minds. It is meant to be a sanctuary where curiosity thrives, ideas flourish, and the journey of learning unfolds seamlessly. However, this idyllic vision is often overshadowed by the pervasive and insidious presence of bullying, a menace that transforms this haven into a breeding ground for fear and anxiety.
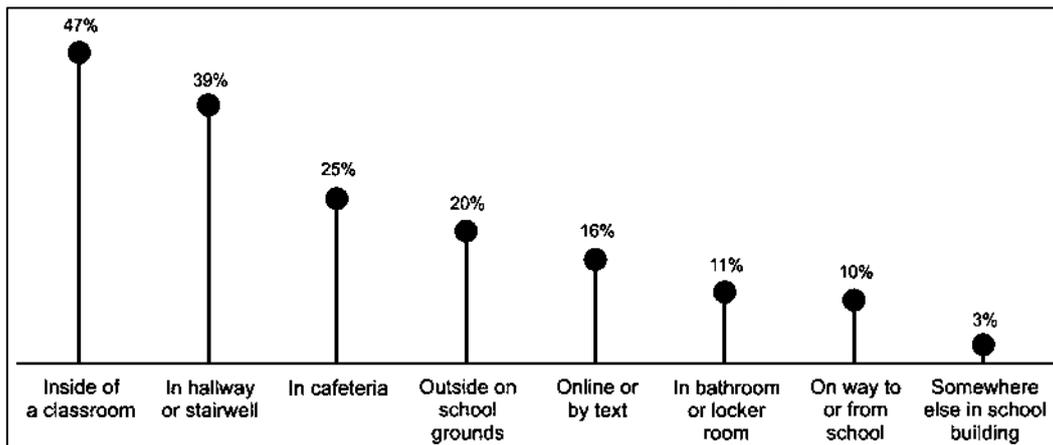
Bullying, in all its multifaceted forms, disrupts the very essence of what a classroom should represent. It extends beyond physical confrontations, permeating the social fabric and emotional well-being of students. To comprehend the full scope of this issue, we embark on a journey into the intricacies of bullying, recognizing it not merely as isolated incidents but as a systemic challenge that demands comprehensive understanding and resolution.

The various manifestations of bullying, be it verbal abuse, social exclusion, or cyberbullying, necessitate a nuanced exploration. In this endeavor, we seek to unravel the complexities and subtle nuances that characterize the dynamics of bullying within the educational landscape. Each form leaves its distinct imprint on the psychological makeup of individuals, influencing their self-esteem, emotional resilience, and overall well-being.

The impact of bullying extends far beyond the immediate individuals involved. Drawing from the field of social psychology, we understand that the classroom operates as a social microcosm where group dynamics play a pivotal role. The repercussions of bullying cast a pervasive shadow, disrupting the delicate balance of interpersonal relationships and hindering the collaborative learning environment essential for academic growth.

As we embark on this exploration, we recognize the urgent need for a comprehensive approach. It is not enough to address bullying as a series of isolated incidents; rather, we must analyze its roots, manifestations, and far-reaching consequences. Only through this holistic understanding can we hope to reclaim the classroom as a space where learning takes center stage, unencumbered by the shadows of fear and anxiety.

Table 1, Where student face bullying

Source: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of justice statistics, School crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimisation Survey 2019

In Table 1 above, the School Crime Supplement (SCS) to the National Crime Victimization Survey 2019, conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, findings from Table 1 reveal that out of 1000 students aged between 12 and 18, a significant number reported experiencing a higher incidence of bullying within the classroom setting.

Understanding Bullying:

Bullying, a pervasive and intricate phenomenon, extends beyond the surface-level manifestations of physical confrontations, permeating the very essence of social interactions within the educational landscape. To unravel the layers of this complex issue, social psychologist Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory becomes an invaluable guide.

Albert Bandura's theory (Bandura, A. 1977, Pg viii 247) posits that individuals learn not only through direct experience but also by observing and imitating the behavior of others. In the context of bullying, this theoretical framework unveils a disconcerting cycle of mistreatment. Students, acting as both witnesses and potential perpetrators, may replicate aggressive actions or exclusionary behaviors they observe in their social milieu. This emulation perpetuates a cycle of negativity, creating an environment where mistreatment becomes contagious.

The contagious nature of bullying, as elucidated by Bandura's theory, underscores the necessity for targeted interventions that penetrate the roots of this destructive cycle. Rather than addressing isolated incidents, a comprehensive approach must recognize the influential role of observational learning in shaping behavior. Educators, parents, and policymakers can draw on this understanding to implement interventions that not only address the visible symptoms of bullying but also disrupt the underlying

mechanisms that fuel its persistence. Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory[1] thus provides a critical lens through which we can comprehend the intricate dynamics of bullying and formulate strategies that break the cycle at its core, fostering an environment where empathy and respect prevail over aggression and exclusion.

The Effects on the Individual:

Within the intricate tapestry of human development, psychologist Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory (Munley, P. H. 1975, 22(4), 314–319) serves as a guiding framework to illuminate the profound and lasting effects of bullying on individuals. Erikson delineates eight stages of psychosocial development, with each stage representing a crucial juncture in the formation of one's identity. Of particular significance is the stage of adolescence, marked by the exploration of personal identity and the establishment of intimate relationships.

Persistent bullying disrupts this delicate process, acting as a corrosive force that erodes the foundation of a healthy identity. The emotional distress inflicted upon victims extends far beyond the immediate circumstances, seeping into the very core of their being. Erikson's theory posits that successful navigation of the challenges in adolescence results in the development of a strong sense of self and the ability to form meaningful connections with others.

In the face of relentless bullying, however, this developmental process is derailed. The compromised sense of self that emerges becomes a pervasive shadow, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and engage with the world. The scars left by bullying can manifest in a diminished self-esteem, creating a formidable barrier to the formation of healthy relationships. The trust essential for building connections is shattered, leaving victims grappling with a profound sense of isolation and mistrust.

Erikson's theory underscores the urgency of addressing bullying not merely as a behavioral issue but as a threat to the very foundation of individual identity formation. By recognizing the intricate interplay between interpersonal relationships and identity development, educators and policymakers can implement targeted interventions that not only address the immediate emotional distress but also contribute to the restoration of a resilient and robust sense of self in the face of adversity.

Impact on the Classroom Atmosphere:

The impact of bullying on the classroom atmosphere is akin to a ripple effect, extending far beyond the direct targets and infiltrating the collective dynamics of the learning environment. Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. 2004, pp. 276–293) offers a nuanced perspective on how group dynamics shape behavior within these educational microcosms. In a classroom marred by the persistent presence of bullying, students find themselves navigating a landscape where negative group norms take root and flourish.

Social Identity Theory posits that individuals categorize themselves and others into social groups, influencing their perceptions and behaviors. In the context of bullying, this categorization can lead to the formation of an "us versus them" mentality, fracturing the unity essential for a positive classroom

atmosphere. Students, in their quest for social belonging, may conform to these negative group norms, perpetuating a cycle of mistreatment and hindering the cultivation of positive social bonds.

The collaborative learning environment, integral to academic growth, becomes compromised as the toxic undercurrents of bullying disrupt the free exchange of ideas. The classroom, ideally a space for shared exploration and intellectual curiosity, transforms into a battleground where fear stifles creativity and collaboration. Recognizing the profound impact of Social Identity Theory within the classroom, educators and administrators can implement strategies that dismantle negative group dynamics, fostering an inclusive atmosphere that nurtures positive social bonds and allows the true essence of learning to flourish.

Breaking the Chains of Bullying:

Education and Awareness: Educating all stakeholders—teachers, parents, and students—is pivotal in dismantling the chains of bullying. A comprehensive understanding of the various forms of bullying and their consequences serves as a powerful tool in prevention. Drawing on the Health Belief Model, heightened awareness transforms bullying from a mere behavioral issue into a recognized threat, motivating individuals to take prompt action. Empowered with knowledge, they become vigilant advocates against mistreatment, actively contributing to the creation of a safer learning environment.

Open Communication: The cornerstone of breaking the chains of bullying lies in the establishment of open communication channels. Inspired by Carl Rogers' person-centered approach, fostering an environment where students feel not just heard but truly understood is imperative. Students should not only be encouraged but should actively feel comfortable discussing their concerns with teachers. In turn, teachers adopting a non-judgmental stance can initiate honest, transparent conversations with the entire class. This commitment to open dialogue is the catalyst for breaking down the barriers that provide a breeding ground for bullying. (Rogers, C. R., 1957, 21(2), 95–103)

Implementing Anti-Bullying Programs: To fortify the educational fortress against bullying, schools must proactively implement comprehensive anti-bullying programs. Embracing the principles of Social Cognitive Theory, these initiatives should not be mere top-down directives but inclusive endeavors involving students, teachers, and parents. By engaging all stakeholders, these programs become a collective commitment to creating a safe and inclusive learning environment. Through active participation, individuals internalize pro-social norms, effectively challenging and reshaping the cultural landscape of the school. The implementation of such programs becomes a proactive step towards not just addressing individual incidents but transforming the very ethos of the educational space.

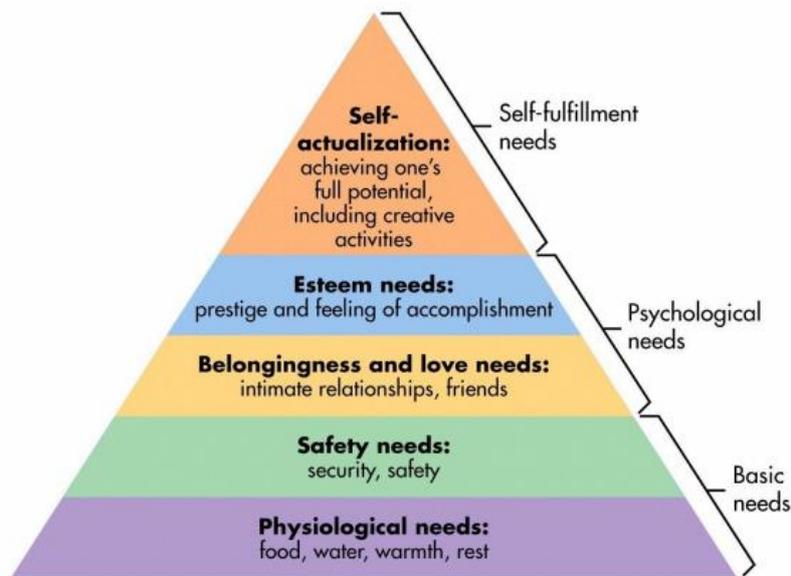**Cultivating a Healthy Psychological Atmosphere:**

Promoting Empathy: In the realm of fostering a healthy psychological atmosphere, drawing inspiration from psychologist Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence theory (Goleman, D, 1995) illuminates a path toward emotional literacy. Emphasizing empathy as a vital component, educators become architects of compassionate learning environments. By nurturing an understanding of others' emotions, students develop a profound capacity for empathy. This emotional intelligence acts as a formidable deterrent to bullying, as individuals become more attuned to the feelings of their peers, fostering a culture of kindness

and support. In the cultivation of empathy, educators sow the seeds of harmonious interpersonal relationships, laying the foundation for a psychologically resilient classroom.

Encouraging Inclusivity: Armed with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), educators wield a powerful instrument in dismantling barriers to inclusivity. By celebrating diversity and acknowledging the unique contributions of each student, teachers disrupt the toxic dynamics of in-group/out-group categorizations. The classroom transforms into a crucible where differences are not only acknowledged but embraced. Through this deliberate cultivation of inclusivity, educators create an environment where students thrive irrespective of their backgrounds. In doing so, they foster a sense of unity, breaking down the divisive walls that bullying often seeks to construct.

Building a Supportive Community: Delving into Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, educators recognize the fundamental importance of human connection in cultivating a healthy psychological atmosphere. The classroom, viewed through this lens, becomes a microcosm of a supportive community. Maslow's theory asserts that belongingness is a fundamental human need, and educators, by actively creating a supportive community within the classroom, address this need. Students find themselves enveloped in an environment that prioritizes collaboration over competition, and empathy over indifference. This supportive community acts as a robust buffer against the isolating effects of bullying, providing a foundation upon which positive social bonds can flourish. In the nurturing of this communal spirit, educators pave the way for a classroom where every student feels valued and connected.

Fig 1, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory

Source : Simply Psychology, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs By Saul McLeod, published May 21, 2018
Fig 1 above, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory in psychology comprising a five-tier model of human needs, often depicted as hierarchical levels within a pyramid. Needs lower down in the hierarchy must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up. From the bottom of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self actualization**.**

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pervasive issue of bullying in educational settings is a complex web of social, psychological, and interpersonal dynamics that requires a comprehensive and empathetic response. As we navigate the intricate tapestry of understanding bullying, the insights provided by psychological theories, such as Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory, offer profound perspectives on the origins and consequences of this destructive behavior.

The classroom, meant to be a sanctuary for intellectual growth, becomes tainted by the far-reaching effects of bullying. Beyond the immediate emotional distress experienced by victims, the ramifications extend to the very core of individual identity and the collaborative essence of the classroom. Social Identity Theory, as elucidated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, sheds light on the group dynamics that permeate a classroom tainted by bullying. The ripple effect of negative group norms hinders the formation of positive social bonds, impeding the free exchange of ideas essential for a healthy learning environment.

Breaking the chains of bullying requires a multi-faceted approach. Education and awareness campaigns, inspired by the Health Belief Model, empower individuals to recognize and report bullying promptly. Open communication, guided by Carl Rogers' person-centered approach, establishes a foundation for honest conversations that break down the barriers allowing bullying to thrive. Implementing anti-bullying programs, grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, transforms passive observers into active participants committed to creating a safe and inclusive learning environment.

Cultivating a healthy psychological atmosphere involves drawing inspiration from Daniel Goleman's Emotional Intelligence theory. By promoting empathy, educators nurture a culture of kindness and support that acts as a deterrent to bullying. Encouraging inclusivity, utilizing Social Identity Theory, transforms the classroom into a space where diversity is celebrated and differences embraced. Building a supportive community, rooted in Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, addresses the fundamental human need for belongingness, acting as a resilient buffer against the isolating effects of bullying.

In our collective responsibility to foster a positive and inclusive educational environment, dismantling negative group dynamics becomes paramount. The ripple effect of bullying within the classroom calls for a concerted effort to reshape the cultural landscape. Through these endeavors, educators become architects of change, sowing the seeds of an environment where every student feels valued, respected, and free to explore the limitless possibilities of learning. It is in this transformative journey that the true essence of education, untarnished by the shadows of fear and anxiety, can flourish.

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