

Relational rehabilitation: Reducing harmful effects caused by bullying

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Abstract

Bullying causes pain and harm to the victims and creates wounds that often remain even if the bullying stops. Additionally, the social dynamics of the classroom community, where most bullying takes place, may remain after the termination of the active bullying of a pupil. This combination of personal trauma and contextual conditions in the classroom community creates a high risk of negative development. Currently, no class-based efforts to repair damages from bullying exist. We suggest a relational rehabilitation initiative, outlined as a model in this paper, as a constructive solution to the problem. With a caring and supportive classroom community, it is possible to prevent further harm from victimization, and promote the development of prosocial behavior and well-being. We argue that the teacher must possess the authority to lead this process of restructuring and improving relationships in the classroom. Furthermore, this process should explicitly include teaching and training in perception, moral engagement, and social skills.

Keywords: Bullying, relational rehabilitation, moral disengagement, teacher authority, prosocial behavior

Introduction

Research has established that at least five percent of pupils are victims of systematic peer bullying at school, although estimates differ widely across countries (Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & Ruan, 2004; Wendelborg, 2017). For victims, bullying is painful when it occurs and is potentially harmful for their psychosocial development (Averdijk, Eisner, & Ribeaud, 2014; Boulton, Smith, & Cowie, 2010; Graham & Juvonen, 1998; Myers & Cowie, 2013; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougal, 2013).

A large body of research related to school bullying provides evidence of negative effects, because peer victimization “gets under the skin” (Vaillancourt et al., 2013), and seeing oneself as a victim with self-blaming attributions places pupils at significant risk (Cowie, 2011). This may cause long-term damage to self-esteem, global and social self-worth, and social self-efficacy; reduced (or declining) self-reported social competence; reduced academic achievement; loneliness; and decreased emotional well-being (Bellmore & Cillessen, 2006; Boulton et al., 2010; Myers & Cowie, 2013). In addition, studies have linked sustained victimization with increased likelihood of psychiatric disorders in adulthood, such as depression and PTSD (Averdijk et al., 2014; Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, & Loeber, 2011; Nielsen, Tangen, Idsoe, Matthisen, & Magerøy, 2015; Sourander et al., 2010). The victim’s distress is understandable given that the three most powerful sources of stress that negatively impact physical and mental health stem from power differentials: low social status, lack of friends, and stress early in life (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), all of which characterize the plight of the bullied child (Hawley & Willieford, 2015).

Victims are placed in a position that may compromise their ability to perform constructive coping strategies. Instead, they often use emotional coping and avoidance strategies to manage bullying, causing the cycle of victimization to continue (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2014; Thornberg, 2015). Such strategies are generally considered inappropriate and

may turn into styles that are difficult to change (Cowie, 2011). Therefore, the effects of bullying at school can persist into adulthood (Cowie & Myers, 2016; Isaacs, Hodge, & Salmivalli, 2008).

To alleviate the bullying problem, research has focused on the ways schools can prevent and stop bullying (Salmivalli & Poskiparta, 2012; Ertesvåg & Vaaland, 2007). Surprisingly, however, Breivik and colleagues (Breivik, Bru, Hancock, Idsøe, Idsøe, & Solberg, 2017) found in a meta-analysis that very little research has addressed strategies that schools can use to support victims' recovery. The authors identified only twelve studies that examined recovery efforts, and all described victim-focused therapy. The school context was not taken into account.

Although individual rehabilitation is a common approach to healthcare, such an approach may be insufficient in bullying cases for two important reasons. First, the number of bullying cases is huge, implying that there are not enough resources for individual therapy. Second, individual therapy may be insufficient in many cases because the classroom community is important for recovery.

When pupils experience good proximal relationships in a classroom, this is productive not only for healing the negative effects of having experienced bullying, which the victims often suffer, but it is also beneficial for the bullies and bystanders. Therefore, a goal of this paper is to outline a possible initiative to promote a supportive classroom community through which vulnerable pupils may recover.

To address this goal, this article first describes how bullying influences the classroom community, often in ways that may persist after termination of the active bullying. Then, we outline a model for classroom-based relational rehabilitation.

The dynamics of bullying: roles and risks

To rehabilitate relations and the class community, we must understand the dynamics of abusive relationships, the benefits pupils gain from bullying, why they are willing to inflict or overlook damage and pain caused to others, and how the pupils involved may suffer from short- and long-term effects.

Bullying is a process in which a child in a less powerful position is repeatedly harassed or excluded by others (Roland, 2014; Salmivalli, 2010). Bullies, as social leaders, may be understood as effective entrepreneurs of identity and establishing norms and prototypes through verbal and nonverbal communication (Hogg & Reid, 2006). According to Hamarus and Kaikkonen (2008), the essence of bullying is created through a constructed difference. A bully who defines what is different among his or her peers creates groups that distinguish between “us” and “them” and, based on that definition, gains acceptance of the values represented by “us.” The “we” of the group is defined in comparison to “them,” who are excluded.

In an ethnographic fieldwork study, Thornberg (2015) found that the participants often used dehumanizing and oddness-related labels (e.g. moron, ugly, nerd, weird, fat, ugly clothes). Such stigmas are difficult to change when an individual is constructed as a victim. Once categorized, pupils are viewed through the lens of the relevant group prototype and represented in terms of how well they embody this prototype. In this way, unidimensional social categorization depersonalizes our perception of people; they are not viewed as unique individuals but as embodiments of negative attributes (Hogg & Reid, 2006).

Abusive behavior affects all pupils in the school classroom, because the behavioral reactions of both the perpetrators and the surrounding peer group can have a direct impact on pupils’ perceived sense of safety (Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni, 2008). Emotions, moral cognition, and behavior all interact and are woven together as children develop, and behavior

patterns are developed, sustained and changed over time as a result of reciprocal interaction between individual and contextual factors (Bandura, 1986; Killen & Smetana, 2013).

Experiences throughout people's lives lead them to establish knowledge structures (e.g. schemas or working models; Bowlby, 1969; Huesmann, 1988) that negatively affect their behavior in everyday situations.

The perpetrators. Abusive bullying relationships may also be damaging for the perpetrators. On the surface, bullies appear to win through the abuse of their power over others. This provides rewards for continuing to engage in these kinds of behavior, but in the long term, the outcomes may not be good (Green & Price, 2017). As Pörhölä (2016) argues, these individuals fail to develop positive peer interaction skills because their apparent popularity is based on fear rather than genuine liking. Because they have previously gained social power by bullying others, the risk that they will repeat the same strategy is high.

The bystanders. In analyzing bullying, Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, and Kaukiainen (1996) identified four additional participant roles: reinforcer (of the bully), assistant (of the bully), outsider (silent approver of the bully), and defender (of the victim). These four roles are identified as bystanders and establish the social context and power in which bullying occurs. Observational studies (e.g. O'Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999) confirm this role set and show that bystanders usually reinforce bullies by actively encouraging the bullying (approximately 20% of the time) and passively watching (approximately 50% of the time).

Peer inaction is not a neutral behavior. Rather, it supports the bully and undermines the victim (Myers & Cowie, 2013). Although bystanders understand that bullying is wrong, they are trapped in a social dilemma. Since the bully ensures the "spirit of the group" by instilling fear, most pupils do not dare to defend the victim because of the realistic fear of becoming a target themselves (Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008). They might wish that they

could do something to stop the bullying, but they are acutely aware of their own need for security within the peer group. Their reluctance to intervene may be due to their understanding of the risks that would ensue if they were to offer protection to victims and the pressure that they are under to conform to group norms. In turn, a lack of intervention may reinforce the initial justifications for bullying, allowing it to become legitimized and explicable in terms of the victim's deviant behavior (Thornberg, 2010).

In summary, ongoing bullying contributes to creating a unidimensional outline of the victim and powerful bullies, surrounded by passive or even supportive bystanders. Such a destructive power structure may more or less persist after a successful intervention to end manifest bullying and make recovery difficult. In addition, repeated abuse gradually makes it normal (Bandura, 1991) and produces moral disengagement.

Moral disengagement

Morality refers to rules that are obligatory, universal, unalterable, and impersonal; moral standards guide behavior and help people distinguish right from wrong (see, e.g. Smetana, 1995; Turiel, 1983). However, people do not always behave according to their own moral standards. To understand the possible gap between moral evaluations and actual behavior, Bandura (1991) proposed his theory of *moral disengagement* (MD) to explain the social-cognitive processes through which good people can engage in harmful behavior toward others, seemingly without self-recrimination or guilt. Specifically, he argued that moral standards and moral reasoning are linked to behavior via several self-regulatory mechanisms that ultimately determine engagement in (im)moral behavior and selectively activate or disengage internal controls across situations. Bandura proposed four sites in this process: the locus of the behavior; the agent of the actions; the outcome of the behavior; and the recipient of the actions.

Operating at the behavior locus, individuals can use *cognitive restructuring* to view negative or immoral behavior more positively with the following strategies: (a) moral justification (seeing the behavior as warranted, appropriate, or performed in the service of a higher moral purpose); (b) euphemistic labeling (labeling the behavior as benign to make it sound less negative or more respectable); or (c) advantageous comparisons (coloring the behavior as less “bad” by comparing it to worse or more negative acts). The second mechanism involves *minimizing* one’s agentic role by displacing personal responsibility for the act to a legitimate authority or diffusing one’s own responsibility for the behavior by emphasizing collective action or group decision making. As group members, bystanders do not perceive themselves to be the main causal agents of the actions and are spared self-condemning reactions. The third set of mechanisms operates by *disregarding or distorting the consequences*, making it easier for an individual to avoid facing the harm caused by the action. When the harmful effects are ignored, minimized, distorted, or disbelieved, there is little reason for self-sanctions to be activated. Finally, through victim attribution, the bully avoids moral distress by *stripping the victim of human qualities* (dehumanization) or thinking that the victim deserves the harm or suffering inflicted on him or her (*blaming the victim*). Maltreatment that is clothed in righteousness makes the victim rather than the perpetrator blameworthy (Bandura, 1991).

A recent meta-analysis by Gini, Pozzoli, and Hymel (2014) found that MD was significantly related to aggressive behavior and bullying. Indeed, Hymel, Rocke-Henderson, and Bonanno (2005) found that reported levels of MD varied as a function of pupils’ experience with bullying, whether as bullies, victims or bystanders. Further, they found that MD accounted for thirty-eight percent of the variance in reported bullying behavior. However, bullies are not the only ones to activate MD mechanisms; MD can also be a more general mechanism that all pupils and teachers activate when they are witnessing a suffering

pupil and fail to intervene or offer support. MD serves pupils' justifications for contributing to bullying or avoiding intervening by supporting desired self-cognition. However, it is important to recognize that selective MD operates not only at the individual level but also at the broader level of the class community and with an even more profound and pervasive impact (Gini, Pozzoli, & Bussey, 2015; Pozzoli, Gini, & Vieno, 2012; Thornberg, Wänström, Pozzoli, & Gini, 2017). When a peer group adopts MD mechanisms, they can cause devastating harm (Boulton et al., 2010; Myers & Cowie, 2013). For example, displacement and the diffusion of responsibility (Latane & Darley, 1968) are not just cognitive denial machinations; they are built into the dynamics of social systems to obscure personal accountability. These psychosocial maneuvers are not just "techniques"; they are grounded in self-regulatory processes (Bandura, 1991). Hence, an abusive relational practice may turn into a long-established style for all parties involved because it affects children's attributional styles and their working models of peers.

In summary, a significant process in bullying is that bullies construct a difference between "us" and someone else, placing "us" in the favored position. This may be viewed as the moral asymmetry in proactive aggression ("my welfare is important, but yours is not") (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004). At the cost of the "them," the advantage of "us" is justified by the perpetrators and bystanders through moral disengagement. In a school classroom, MD creates a group norm that may persist when the active bullying ends, hindering the pupil's recovery. In addition, bystanders may be afraid of the bullies, hindering them from including a former victim, and perpetrators may maintain inappropriate behavioral patterns.

A Model of Relational Rehabilitation

Stopping bullying is vital. However, as outlined above, ongoing bullying in a school classroom fosters social and mental dynamics that are likely to persist under the surface even after a successful intervention stops the manifest behavior. Hence, it is not enough to stop the

bullying. Some form of rehabilitation is necessary, and such rehabilitation should have a broad focus.

The question, then, is how the peer ecology can be improved by more prosocial interactions after the bullying stops and the implication this may have for classroom leadership strategies. The proposed model of relational rehabilitation consists of three steps: (1) ensuring teacher authority; (2) redistributing power and promoting a supportive class community; and (3) providing social and emotional learning to the entire class. The rationale is then that the victim, as well as the bullies and the bystanders, will benefit.

We should be aware of the importance of an appropriate implementation process consisting of training, supervision, and support (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005). Even the most well-described, standardized, scientifically-based classroom intervention programs are enacted in practice in ways that vary widely from child to child and classroom to classroom (e.g. Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Bumbarger, 2001). For the teacher to change the class dynamic and establish a process of relational rehabilitation, we consider the first phase of the process to be rather intensive. However, all three steps should remain an ongoing focus in the classroom, thereby ensuring a high-quality class community.

1. Ensuring teacher authority

Authoritative teaching and classroom leadership stand out as a powerful approach to pupils' academic and social learning and may buffer pupils from negative peer experiences or a troublesome background (Ertesvåg, 2011). Such relationships have proven to be important predictors of academic and social adjustment (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Roland & Galloway, 2002). The theoretical approach of the authoritative teacher is based on the work of Baumrind (1967, 1991) and her model of parenting styles. She used the dimensions of control (high versus low control) and warmth (high versus low warmth) to derive a four-fold classification

of parenting styles. Authoritative parents have high levels of both control and warmth. When applying Baumrind's typology to practical teaching, the teacher's authoritative style is the primary focus (e.g. Ertesvåg, 2011; Roland & Galloway, 2002; Wentzel, 2002).

Authoritative teachers work to build relationships of warmth, acceptance, and openness; they establish high standards and have high expectations of socially responsible behavior; they enforce rules and standards in a firm and consistent manner while using reprimands and punitive strategies when necessary; and they promote autonomy by encouraging the pupil's participation in decisions about his/her behavior (Ertesvåg, 2011, p. 52).

We argue that teacher authority can counteract a destructive classroom power structure and provide moral engagement. Classroom leadership has two distinct purposes: to establish and sustain an orderly environment so pupils can engage in meaningful academic learning, and to enhance pupils' social and moral growth (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Roland and Galloway (2002) found a rather strong relationship between teachers' class management, and the social structure of the class and bullying. As an authoritative figure, the teacher may be the chief architect and manager of relational practices in the classroom (Hughes, Im, & Wherly, 2014). In their review, Jennings and Greenberg (2009) conclude that healthy and supportive teacher-pupil relationships provide the keystone to effective classroom leadership and a prosocial classroom climate. This perspective is supported by Thornberg and colleagues (2017), who found that school classes that had more caring, warm, and supportive teacher-pupil relationships tended to be characterized by similar peer relationships.

The rehabilitation process will not be productive if it is initiated by a weak teacher in a class that is negatively ruled by former bullies (Garandau, Lee, & Salmivalli, 2014; Sutton, Smith, & Swettenham, 1999). A teacher needs to be in a position that allows her to act as a role model and as a valuable reinforcer of desired behavior. For this to happen, the teacher

needs to be well-prepared to deliver required practice in her interactions with the pupils (Fixsen et al., 2005). Hence, it may be necessary to provide teachers with training and/or supervision by someone inside the school or external agencies that specialize in improving authority and competence in classroom leadership, and in some occasions supported by additional teacher resources to ensure sufficient teacher authority in the classroom. Several efforts have shown to be beneficial in improving teacher authority as promotion initiative or interventions in school classes with severe challenges (e.g. Allen, Pianta, Gregory, Mikami, & Lun, 2011; Ertesvåg, 2009; Bakken & Roland, 2015). In the following section, we will suggest how to target poor social dynamics and promote moral engagement in a prosocial and supportive environment.

2. Redistribution of social power and promoting a supportive class community

Regardless of changing classroom dynamics, a class of pupils will continue to develop as a social system. For any social group, the concept of dominance and power is real in the everyday struggle of negotiating allegiances and jostling for social positions (Pörhölä, 2016). In an abusive class community, social power may be wielded by anti-social behavior, such as bullying, affecting MD, perception, and group norms. The question, then, is which of the crucial social processes the teacher can lead or influence. After terminating a bullying situation, the relational structure in the class may be in a vacuum for a certain period, and relationships may have different dynamics from those experienced during the period of bullying. Such a situation makes it possible to reconstruct the relationships and redistribute social influence to pupils who possess more prosocial attitudes and behaviors. We suggest that screening roles and relational practice, building alliances, and promoting a supportive class community should be emphasized in this phase.

Screening roles and relational structure. Initially, to achieve knowledge about the classroom's social structure, the school may conduct a non-anonymous screening of the class relationships and learning climate (e.g. Spekter; Roland, Kolstø-Johansen, & Auestad, 2018). Open screening of the class may reveal which pupils hold which positions, and the power structure may be clarified. This is crucial information for the next steps. These analyses might also identify the lonely pupils and the classmates to whom they are connected. Such information is important to acquire knowledge about which peers are most likely to be activated as valuable resources during rehabilitation efforts.

Building alliances. When confronting bullies with the knowledge of their position and actions in the process of stopping the bullying, the bullies should also be invited – and expected – to contribute to the new relational practice in the classroom, as in an alliance. However, the changes in the classroom should not be dependent solely on the pupils' decision to change. The new classroom dynamics must be based on high-quality classroom leadership. Sutton and colleagues (1999) describe bullies as more skilled in finding vulnerabilities in others, making them capable of gaining power and dominance. This includes searching for weakness in their teachers (Vaaland & Roland, 2013). High-status bullies, whose strategies have been most “successful” in eliciting social rewards, appear to be the most resistant to efforts to reduce or replace abusive behavior (Garandau et al., 2014). These bullies may attempt to maintain the status quo because it is beneficial to sustaining their social power. During this phase, a teacher's unclear or ambiguous leadership may provide these pupils the opportunity to maintain informal leadership and to consolidate their position (Vaaland, 2017). However, it is important that the identified perpetrators should not be confronted in public, which could cause the class to turn against them with justified anger, creating new sets of dysfunctional relationships for the former bully as the new victim in the class. All pupils must be treated with respect, warmth, and care, regardless of their former roles, and the teacher

needs to communicate to pupils that they are equally important. This is the foundation of a supportive class community.

By breaking up the previous social dominance structure and neutralizing the power dynamics in the class, the teacher should help the pupils find a more comfortable place for themselves in the social system. Pupils should be given an opportunity that promotes the possibility of establishing new friendships, shedding prior social roles, and developing new identities that correspond with their interests (Farmer et al., 2011). However, as Hawley and Willieford (2015) argue, one should not try to equalize the hierarchy. It is more effective to target the norms, perceptions, attitudes and efficacy beliefs to establish a climate and culture that promotes friendship and prosocial behavior. The authoritative teacher may motivate and increase the value of prosocial behavior that can lead pupils to reach social power. When pupils understand how they can become leaders and gain high levels of self-esteem by being helpful, cooperative, friendly, and sociable (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982; De Bruyn & van den Boom, 2005), they may be more likely to develop prosocial strategies within their relationships. Because prosocial social dominants have the welfare of their peers' firmly in mind and place social relationships above their own instrumental goals, they may function as good role models for their peers (Hawley & Willieford, 2015). Further, they may acquire this leading position instead of a less prosocial social dominant.

Promoting supportive class community. Pörhölä (2016) suggests that supportive peer relationships may provide an arena in which negative beliefs about oneself and others can be corrected, thereby reducing loneliness and enhancing self-esteem. When victimization desists over time and victims can replace emotional-oriented coping styles with more adaptive coping styles, the impact of risk factors caused by bullying may be reduced (Garnefski & Kraij, 2014). They may look less like victims and begin to exhibit the adjustment profile of those without a history of victimization, demonstrating a pattern of positive adjustment (e.g. Hanish

& Guerra, 2002; Rajabi, Bakhshani, Saravani, Khanjani, & Bagian, 2017). However, without access to social support, this change may be challenging.

Cohen, Underwood, and Gottlieb (2000) provide two models that describe the relationship between social support and social functioning. *The main effect model* suggests that social support has a positive benefit for all children and can help improve children's overall psychosocial functioning. *The stress buffering theory* suggests that social support primarily benefits children who are at risk or under stress and that social support can buffer the negative effects of stress. Social support can be used as a coping mechanism when the support received matches the stress the pupil experiences (for example, receiving emotional support when being excluded at school). If a pupil feels excluded, the current and future perceived experience may be positively affected by knowing that he or she received enough social support to overcome that stressor. Hence, feeling safe and supported in school is broadly documented as powerfully promoting mental health, social functioning and well-being (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013).

Prosocial behavior has a strong positive association with later peer acceptance (Caprara, Barbanelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, & Zimbardo, 2000) and this relationship is likely to be bidirectional, as children who feel accepted are more likely to do things for others (Sandstrom & Cillessen, 2006). Another possible effect of a supportive community is a higher acceptance of deviance, and pupils may be more easily invited into common discussions about values, multiplicity, social inclusion, caring and tolerance. Regarding relational rehabilitation, the likelihood of peacefully reconstructing a prosocial class community increases when all pupils share a mutual interest in repairing damage to their relationships and have access to relational-repair mechanisms (Cowie, 2011). These conditions may facilitate opportunities for all pupils, regardless of their former roles, to practice interaction skills and

develop along with age-related expectations. Therefore, pupils should be provided with safe strategies for supporting vulnerable peers and behaving in a prosocial manner.

3. Providing social and emotional learning to the whole class.

The potential to address moral cognition and build a supportive class community is not a new idea; it has been discussed in the literature for years. Research suggesting how it might be possible to influence pupils' moral cognition and social skills and their relations to peers and adults is harder to find, however.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) programs commonly address a broad spectrum of knowledge, attitudes and skills that are required to behave in a prosocial manner. This includes understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, feeling and showing empathy for others, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, and making responsible decisions (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Durlak, 2017).

Although SEL programs are usually measured in relation to aggression and other externalizing behaviors, they have demonstrated equally positive impacts for internalizing problems (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011; Sklad, Diekstra, Ritter, Ben, & Gravensteijn, 2012), but they have rarely specifically measured bullying. However, there are some exceptions. For instance, Rajabi and colleagues (2017) have shown that group-based SEL interventions, including elements from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), improve victims' use of constructive strategies and reduce the use of emotion-focused strategies. Further, meta-analyses examining school-based interventions that address traumatic stress demonstrate the beneficial support and effects that stem from CBT-based interventions (Jaycox, Stein, & Wong, 2014; Rolfsnes & Idsoe, 2011).

The fundamental principle of CBT is that individual cognitive processes play a key role in the growth and survival of a person's emotional and behavioral responses (Rajabi et al., 2017). For instance, both MD and perceptual abilities may be affected during abusive

relationship praxes and should therefore be targeted. SEL programs provide children with direct instruction on replacement behaviors and skills for avoiding and effectively responding to bullying and other challenging situations. These programs focus on enhancing young people's strengths, establishing an engaging and supportive context, supporting teachers' pedagogy and instructional quality, and providing opportunities to improve the quality of pupils' peer and adult relationships (Greenberg et al., 2017).

Social Perception Training: an example. One such program was examined in a recent study of class-based Social Perception Training (SPT; Finne & Svartdal, 2017), focusing on adjustments to the above outlined core mechanisms. This study showed that pupils' MD, measured by cognitive distortions (Gibbs, Potter, & Goldstein, 1995), was significantly reduced, whereas the pupils' relationships with peers and teachers were positively influenced. In addition, based on parent reporting, social skills increased significantly. Because MD is detrimental to social interaction, it is important to provide pupils with an appropriate understanding of different aspects of social perception and cognition through which the occurrence of MD may be prevented or reduced. In this study, the SPT was measured as a promotion effort in classes with already low levels of MD and high scores on relations. However, the results lend support to the idea that school classes in need of efforts to rehabilitate relations and the social structure may benefit from a program such as SPT.

The program consists of an introduction and program overview followed by nine topics: (1) emotional awareness; (2) open and hidden rules; (3) cultural differences; (4) setting events (background variables); (5) the complex interaction between thoughts, feelings, body signals, and behavior; (6) interpretation of others' intent; (7) cognitive distortions; (8) timing; and (9) consequences (if-then relations). Throughout the intervention, pupils are encouraged to actively participate in learning activities. Pictures, discussions and role play are used to clarify how these different topics and factors affect oneself and others during social

interactions. (For further reading, see program manual, Gundersen, Strømgren, & Moynahan, 2013).

In each session, the teacher sets up a situation as a role play, introducing different roles in the situation, and the pupils discuss together how they can cope with the situation using different prosocial acts. When suggesting alternative ways of continuing the role play, pupils must argue why their solution is rewarding, correct, and fair for the different roles in the play. By roleplaying different roles in a situation, pupils may be provided with constructive and positive feedback from the teacher and their peers. Through common vocabulary, roleplaying, feedback and discussion, the individual pupils and the class as a whole may enhance their repertoire of moral cognition, alternative actions and competent strategies.

A program such as SPT enhances teachers' access to cognitive and behavioral strategies, which can enhance pupils' social growth by promoting a behavioral, emotional and moral context that supports prosocial patterns. When a teacher models the social and emotional skills promoted in a program such as SPT, she may impart these skills and newly learned terms to the pupils in everyday life at school, and will thereby influence the learning climate over time (Domitrovich et al., 2016). At the simplest level, teachers who display prosocial and caring behavior are modeling many of the relational skills that characterize children's mutual friendships. In this way, the teacher may "set the stage" for classroom friendships to emerge naturally, which may be more effective than attempting to engineer friendships more directly (Gest & Rodkin, 2011). Beyond simple modeling, teachers who establish a warm and supportive class community are providing a context in which pupils can safely explore and practice positive peer relational skills (Pörhölä, 2016).

Such class-based programs allow for the important inclusion of bystanders, who should be utilized in such efforts, because their behavior might be easier to change than the behavior of aggressive bullies and vulnerable victims. Consequently, the social rewards

associated with bullying (and the motivation to bully in the first place) can be diminished (Salmivalli, 2010), and the goal of creating a supportive class community may be achieved more easily.

An encouraging outcome of pupil-based classroom interventions is the positive benefits for teachers' efficacy beliefs and perceptions (Domitrovich et al., 2016). This positive impact may be a secondary effect of the program's impact on pupils caused by the teacher's exposure to the intervention context and/or as a function of the coaching support that accompanies some interventions. Consequently, pupil-based interventions may be an important contribution to the teacher's authority in the classroom. Hence, the benefits for both pupils and teachers justify the use of pupil-based classroom interventions.

Conclusion

In this article, we argue that promoting prosocial behavior and a supportive class community is beneficial for all pupils. However, in the current model, we mainly emphasize the possible positive outcome for victims of bullying. We suggest that social support and prosocial interactions can buffer the negative effects of bullying and promote development of social competence and constructive coping strategies, along with age-related expectations.

Bullying is an interaction that usually occurs within complex social dynamics. Bullies, bystanders, and victims may be part of a highly structured social group that carefully negotiate allegiances and jostle for power positions (Pörhölä, 2016; Sutton et al., 1999). Because bullying is a relational attack, appropriate efforts to repair wounds should focus on the relational practices rather than on the individual victims. The costs and benefits of different strategies for gaining and maintaining status should be addressed in a way that makes aggression appear more costly than it is rewarding. In particular, pupils who desire a high position within the peer group should be aware that popularity might be obtained by

being nice, friendly and helpful. This may facilitate improved social dynamics in the class. Therefore, based on the arguments above, we propose that bullying should be stopped as soon as possible, and relational rehabilitation should be initiated. The current model outlines a three-step process: 1. ensuring the teacher's authority; 2. redistributing social power and promoting a supportive class community; and 3. providing social and emotional learning for the entire class.

It is unlikely that new practices can occur unless the teacher is well-prepared to deliver the required practices in her interactions with the pupils. The teacher should therefore be provided with appropriate support, training, and supervision (Allen et al., 2011; Ertesvåg, 2009; Fixsen et al., 2005). However, conceptualizing a process based on empirical evidence that specifies teaching praxes and forming peer relations is uncommon and difficult. These difficulties include the sheer diversity of constructive teaching praxes and the equally numerous aspects of peer relationship mechanisms that can be influenced (Gest & Rodkin, 2011). In addition, parents and others may also play a crucial role in the occurrence of bullying, the outcome of rehabilitation efforts and teacher authority. Furthermore, much knowledge regarding, for instance, morality, aggression, classroom norms and roles are based on correlational studies, whereas we propose causality, in that reduced MD and improved relational interactions are suggested for promoting rehabilitating conditions for victims of bullying. Hence, it is necessary to examine the current model under controlled implementation conditions while also including parent involvement.

It is necessary to point out that relational rehabilitation not is supposed to replace what is professional individual therapy or support. Some pupils may need both. Rather, we suggest that the relational approach may be more appropriate in a school context, because this approach underlines both the responsibility and the solution regarding abusive relationships.

Of practical interest is whether efforts to counter morally disengaged reasoning not

only improve social competence but also can effectively facilitate recovery from the damage caused by bullying behavior. Although no studies to date have explored such possibilities directly, we believe the foci outlined in the current paper may contribute positively to future research. Because no classroom-based efforts to reduce the effects of bullying are known, we encourage practitioners and researchers to develop, implement and examine interventions that will reduce the harm caused by bullying and promote psychosocial development for those in greatest need.

Acknowledgement: The authors are grateful to Helen Cowie for useful comments in the early stage of the writing process.

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