

# Bullying, Deaf Students and Physical Education Classes

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## ABSTRACT

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Currently, the school has been the scene of several acts of violence and these one has affected students and teachers alike. Among students, growing reports of bullying and possibly because of this phenomenon came to be treated more often by the media, which also discuss the effects for the victims of these acts. In general, bullying is perceived as aggressive, derogatory, cruel, systematic and prolonged acts manifested in interpersonal relationships among students. Often, bullying occurs due to disregard the differences and the victims are individuals with disability, obese, very high, and so on. Considering this, the aim of study was to investigate the opinions about bullying of students with deafness, Physical Education teachers and school administrator. It is a qualitative research and participants were selected intentionally in the regular school, located in northeast of Brazil. Namely, two teachers of Physi-

cal Education, the school principal and twelve students with deafness took part of research. All of them were interviewed by one of researcher and the audio was transcribed for analysis. The analysis of content was used for this. The results showed that students with deafness understood that bullying consisted of derogatory nicknames that denigrated and acts of physical aggression between classmates. Both school administrator as Physical Education teachers had knowledge about bullying and its effects on the school community. In relation to bullying and Physical Education classes, the actors (students and teacher) believed that such discipline had characteristics that, if not well managed, could increase the emergence of cases of bullying. All participants considered necessary changes in the way the school deals with bullying and further actions to raise awareness of the school community and the family.

### Key Words

*Inclusion, Deafness, Bullying, Adapted Physical Activity (APA)*

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## INTRODUCTION

Today many community schools have experienced violence, both inside and within their surroundings, and students may also be involved in different way. Mendes (2011) considered that bullying is the kind of scholar violence among students more common and it encompasses aggressive, repetitive and intentional acts against other colleague, provoking pain and anguish.

When bullying acts occur they can "...take several forms that include name calling, teasing, physical attacks, severe verbal bullying, verbal aggression, threats, taking belongings, imitating and making fun of the students with disabilities" (Carter and Spencer, 2006, p. 21). The bullying is different from the jokes when everybody has a fun and is interacting without any kind of aggression. In this case, some participants are suffering while others are provoking this. Such acts may also be called cyberbullying. Hadjikakou and Panayiotis (2012) mentioned that it happens when the aggressors use technological means (social networks or mobile phones) to disseminate depreciative information with the publicly intention to humiliate their victims.

In general, there are victims and aggressors in the bullying acts and Schwartz (2000) subdivided victims and aggressors into four groups: aggressive victims, non-aggressive victims, non-victimized aggressors, and normative contrasts. The aggressors are usually popular students, recognized as bullies that oppress and threaten their victims to impose authority. Victims are chosen without a clear reason and they may have some particularity, such as habits, behaviors, physical appearance, and lack of skill in any sport and/or disability. Usually they are insecure, shy and have low self-esteem (Chalita, 2008). There are still spectators, also known as witnesses. They are the vast majority of students attending the bullying and they learn to live with it or simply to escape him (Silva, 2010). The last character that comes to aggressors is the victims while suffering commit violent acts against others.

Deaf students have specific needs which sometimes differentiates them from others due to the fact that they cannot hear and/or and may use sign language (Vieira and Martins, 2009). This is important because some bullies search for victims that have some characteristic that differentiates them from other people (Hadjikakou & Panayiotis, 2012). For instance, Carter and Spencer (2006) reported that, students with disabilities, both visible and non-visible, experienced bullying more than their general education peers.

Bearing in mind the negative effects that bullying has on all of those involved and considering the few number of studies involving bullying and deaf students (Mishna, 2003). Moreover, Botelho and Souza (2007) indicate that there are few Brazilian studies involving this theme and as a consequence there is nearly nothing published about it. This situation became worst when we relate bullying, physical education classes and people with disabilities.

The purpose of this investigation was to know the point of view about bullying of students with deaf, physical education teachers and school administrator in the Youth and Adult Education Program (YAEP).

## METHODS

**Participants:** The subjects of this research were two physical educators from the Youth and Adult Education Program (known as EJA in Brazil), the School Principal and 12 deaf students from a State School, in the city of Maceió, Alagoas/Brazil. The YAEP is for youths and adults that did not attend the school when they were children; in reason of this they are not literate or fully literate. This Program has restorative, equalizing and qualifying functions.

The students were between 19 and 53 years old (mean 27 years), from both gender and they were all enrolled in the YAEP of a State school in city of Maceio, Alagoas, Brazil, mainly in the elementary school levels. They all are able to communicate by the Brazilian Sign Language

(LIBRAS), most of them could not hear at all and only two of them could speak.

The two physical educators who taught the YAEP students and their school principal were interviewed. All of them were graduated (Physical Education and Pedagogy, respectively), as well as post-graduated in their specific areas. Their professional experience range from 8 to 23 years of experience and they had been working in this school for a long time. Moreover, it is important to inform that this school was a reference in the education of student with deaf in the Maceió, Alagoas and there were a huge number of students with deaf studying there and the professional team had experiences with bilingual education.

**Instruments:** The instrument was the semi-structured interview. According to Boni and Quaresma (2005), the researcher asks a series of prearranged questions but it is possible to add extra questions in order to obtain the answers to the initially proposed questions.

**Procedures of data collecting:** All the procedures for the data collection rigorously followed the ethical principles and all the participants were asked to sign the informed consent form, after explained the purpose of the research and to how they would contribute to it. The study protocol was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Alagoas, protocol number 028263/2010-12.

The interviews were made individually and the deaf students were interviewed with the help of the sign language interpreters who work in the school classrooms of the specific group of students. All the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed and translated to spoken Brazilian Portuguese.

**Research Design:** This is a qualitative investigation. Flick (2009) mentioned that qualitative studies are considered the communication of the researcher with the field and its members as an explicit part in the production of knowledge. Furthermore, Gunther (2006) explained that qualitative research is characterized by the direct interaction of the researcher and the object

of study, it is then, possible to notice an explicit acceptance over the theory, the choice of the research topic and method, and the interpretation of the results.

**Data Analysis:** For the data analysis a content analysis was "formed by a group of possible techniques for the treatment of previously collected data" (Esteves, 2006, p.107) or by means of observation data, interviews, etc. From this process two categories emerged: The use of a studied group related to bullying and the bullying in the physical education classes in YAEP.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Concept of Bullying:** when the deaf students were asked about the word bullying, none knew the term or the equivalent sign for it in Brazilian Sign Language. They were also asked about violence in their school, among classmates, they mentioned many situations including some in which they actually observed and/or experienced. For students with deaf bullying occurs through aggressive acts, by using expressions which defamed them and the act of associating them to denigrated words used by the aggressors. They reported that:

People are calling names, saying things against people with deaf or against me, laughing, calling idiot (Student Ana).

There are people who are calling me dumb and they think that I am stupid. I do not like this. Then I explain that I'm deaf and this is different from being dumb (Student José).

When the physical educators, teachers and the school principal were asked about bullying, all three were familiar with the phenomenon. For instance the school principal stated:

It is any manifestation of aggression towards an individual. When we talk about bullying, we think of aggression and violence, but bullying can occur through words, so it is any kind of aggression towards another human being no matter if it is verbal, oral or physical. And it must happen many times (School Principal Taís).

They all could understand this act of violence as defined by Hadjikakou and Panayiotis (2012).

***Bullying in Physical Education Classes in Youth and Adult Education Program:*** Bullying in Physical Education Classes was the focus of our attention in this investigation and for this reason we asked the participants how they perceived this phenomenon and the relationship between physical education and bullying.

The students had different opinions about bullying, but the majority said they had already observed aggressive behaviors among students in the physical education. These classes sometimes become a niche of acts of bullying due to the fact that it involves the body and the physical abilities of the students (Oliveira and Votre, 2006). One physical educator said that:

I believe that in P.E. classes you are exposed, you expose yourself because we work with our body. You show your abilities and not everybody has all the abilities, so I believe this becomes more visible in P.E. classes (Teacher Nara).

In contrast, the other physical educator explained that he understood that bullying could happen in physical education classes due to other factors, such as the dimension of gymnasium and the least controlled environment, and not to specifically the content. Teacher Carlos said that:

I believe our problem is that we work in a very big space. I mean we go from a classroom to a gymnasium or sports field and this can make it easier to become effective any situation that already exists in the classroom.

The physical education teachers had different opinions about the bullying in their classes and they did not mention about this acts against to the students with deaf in the P.E. classes. It is up to the physical educator to be able to identify, distinguish and diagnose the phenomenon

of bullying, avoid the formation of new targets, and the growth of such phenomena (Chaves, 2006).

The opinion of deaf students who were interviewed was that the teachers did not do anything when they saw an act of bullying in the classroom; they only ask both students to leave the room, no matter if they were the aggressor or the victim. As one of the students related:

It's as if the teachers didn't really care, so I said: "Teacher, please". The teacher looks at me laughs and continues the class, as if he were saying: "Don't worry about her. She is just a child". The teacher doesn't understand and thus doesn't ask her to stop, nor does anything about it. It's as if the [physical education] teacher didn't really care, what matters for him is to focus on the board, it doesn't really matter what is happening to the students (Student Marlene).

Based on at least this report some physical education teachers still very permissive towards acts of bullying in their classrooms and do nothing to stop it, even when it happened very close to them. Furtado and Morais (2010) suggested that most teachers prioritized their didactic roles and the chronogram which was scheduled by the school, however Lisboa et al. (2009) have emphasized the need for teachers to try to stop bullying at their institutions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

We believe that deaf students realized that bullying is manifested through teasing and nicknames calling and through physical aggression. Most of them perceived themselves as victims as they suffered verbal aggression related to their linguistic condition and also due to the prejudice people have against sign language.

Concerning bullying in physical education classes with deaf students, physical educators and the school principal all believed the development and implementation of an appropriate program was not well administered, and could

even enhance acts of bullying. On the other hand, the physical education emotional and social environment can contribute to the reduction of acts of bullying; minimizing such acts not only for deaf students but for all the community of students attending their school.

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