

# BULLYING AND WORD CIRCLES

## AN APPROACH FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PROCESS WORK

*Benvinguda,  
diversitat!* 



**Stop bullying**

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I want to dedicate this project to everyone who loves education and who dedicates themselves to it with body and soul,  
and to all children.

Also to my inner child, who is still a child and has also grown.

## Carta a una misma a los 15 años

Adriana Bertran<sup>1</sup>

Ahora que te doblo la edad, y triplico  
el amor hacia ti misma,  
que me he sentado a tomar té  
tantas tardes  
con los mismos monstruos que a ti  
te paralizan,  
te escribo,  
y confío, porque aun soy así de crédula,  
que mis palabras llegarán a ese pasado,  
hace quince años, a mis quince años, que arañarán  
la desesperación que trae la adolescencia,  
la urgencia antigua de comprenderlo todo,  
y esa tenaz necesidad de aprobación  
que los años han felizmente dirigido  
hacia unos pocos jueces  
mucho menos severos  
que tus compañeros de cuarto de la ESO.  
Conjugarás “deber” como el auxiliar de todos los verbos,  
y “estar” se confundirá con “ser”.  
Crees que quienes legislan la sintaxis de tu vida  
te conocen,  
y vivirás en el hiato  
entre lo que te dicen ser  
y lo que eres, por amor  
a una tribu que no te protege  
porque no te ve.  
Envidiarás a la gente normal,  
que pertenece,  
y por eso he venido a chivarte que la normalidad  
será siempre un hotel de sábanas rígidas,  
y que tu casa, Adriana, ha estado siempre fuera  
del impoluto hotel donde los normales se acuestan  
y se levantan, se acuestan

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<sup>1</sup>I heard this poem while I was in the drafting of the project and it connected me to my work, to my history and to many others. That's why I start here, with a poem that brings us closer to the world of emotions and stories. <https://adrianabertran.wordpress.com/> Here it is read by the author with subtitles in English [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=3&v=9YFgcPwjTDs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=9YFgcPwjTDs)

y se levantan, y en medio charlan de fútbol  
(no, a los treinta aun no entiendo  
qué le ven),  
y tú aún no sabes hacer  
ese *copy-paste*  
de sus conversaciones de aire, hinchadas  
como balones;  
pero aprenderemos, así, como se aprende a cruzar  
la calle en verde  
cuando no pasan coches.

Tenía que contarte que fuera de su hotel  
no hay un foso de dragones y ostracismo;  
que era verdad eso de “los niños son tan crueles”;  
que el deber de ser iguales no impide  
que crezcamos diferentes;  
que somos tantas, y tantos  
viviendo en una tribu de casas  
fuera de ese hotel de rígidas  
e implacables sábanas;  
que no había que escoger ser fiel  
o a los demás o a una misma; que el idioma  
que hablamos lo entienden  
tantos  
y tantas...

Te prometo, Adriana, un imperio de verdad  
serena y clara.

Los dedos que te acusan, las voces que te insultan,  
Los ecos que la soledad rebota, asfixiada,  
son un túnel demasiado largo,  
no el destino. Porque aún no hemos llegado.

Nos separan  
cinco mil cuatrocientos setenta y cinco días  
y te he amado en cada uno  
casi tanto  
como sé que todas las Adrianas del futuro  
nos están amando.

## Acknowledgements

I want to start my thanks naming the team of Fil a l'agulla. Many years ago, I had the opportunity to meet them and we started working together on a project with teenagers in a Secondary School and our relationship has continued since then. Fil a l'agulla and especially the education team, has inspired many of the reflections that I share. Together we have created this way of working that I describe. This project is the product of years of work together, exploring, inventing and testing ways to intervene in the classroom to work on discrimination. Thanks to Noemí Canelles who has helped me with the structure of the project and, especially, Sara Carro, with whom I began to facilitate the group dynamics in the schools, the three of us have made a great team in the project of School M.<sup>2</sup> Thanks also to Lídia Casanovas - sharing this year in other projects and doing Word Circles together has helped me a lot.

Thanks to my teachers, Gill Emslie, Andy Smith, Evelyn Figueroa, Boris Sopko, Stanya Studentova and Lily Vassilou, for their personal and professional support, for helping me to love myself more and to believe more in my work. You help me a lot to continue learning. A deep thank you.

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Thanks to Dawn Menken and Ingrid Rose, their work in the educational world has helped me a lot for the development of this project.

Thanks to Julie Diamond for all her research in the field of power, a subject that I am passionate about and has been an important seed to understand more the dynamics of bullying.

To Joe Goodbread who has helped me to understand conflict more deeply, through his book.

And especially to Arnold Mindell for the impulse and development of such an exciting framework as the Process Work, which has helped me to know myself, relationships and the world, in impressive and unexpected dimensions.

Thank you!

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<sup>2</sup>I wanted to preserve the confidentiality of the school, so from now on the project is cited as school M.

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# 1. Introduction

Something that has marked my life is my own process of schooling. I don't have good memories of my time in school. Was it because I was a shy girl who had trouble making friends, or because my own classmates and schoolmates harassed me? Whatever it was, and later I'll go into it in more detail, this defines me and has been one of the most important driving forces of development of my life. In fact, every time I go to a school to work on relationships in class, I live the process with them, and I connect again with my dream, with the desire that all people be seen and recognized for who they are and everyone can find their place.

M. Garaigordobil (2010) defines bullying as "a specific form of continual school violence between peers, in which one or more aggressors with greater power and intention to cause pain have subjected a weaker schoolmate to violence". I don't remember people who as such exercised systematic violence towards me, but I remember jokes that others did to me and I didn't laugh. I do not know if I was weak, what I do know is that there were times when I was not ok. I didn't talk much with the others to tell them what was going on with me and I cried a lot. Is this being weak? Now when I remember it I also cry, and what hurts me the most and I find it more difficult to accept is that this happened to me. How to accept what happened and love that girl who cried and who did the best she could at that moment, and also to love those kids who played and, without fully realizing it, hurt other people. And I say this, not because I believe that this is what should happen, but because this is what helps me now.

I was not fully aware that doing this work was also about me. And I realize that I can not do it any other way. It is my own experience that has made me learn a lot in this field and that has led me to work in schools for more than 10 years and it is also from my own experience that I can understand this topic in more depth. That's why some examples are based on my own personal experience and others on my professional experience. For this reason, for the personal and professional connection, this project focuses on knowing more about the dynamics of bullying in the school environment, as well as the prevention and intervention in these cases.

## **1.1. Fil a l'agulla and team working in the educational world**

In 2006, I began to do regular workshops in schools and institutes working in education for peace and in 2010, looking for someone to collaborate with in a project with young people called "Learning to relate to one another and relating to each other we learn".<sup>3</sup> In a secondary school in Barcelona, I met Fil a l'agulla. This was the seed for a relationship that still continues.

Fil a l'agulla is a working cooperative, which focuses on facilitation in the field of personal, relational and group development in the educational, organizational and community world. It was born in 2009, in Barcelona, and it continues growing, now in 2018 having 9 members and 7 collaborators.

The work of Fil a l'agulla in the field of bullying has been progressive. The starting point was coeducation and, over time, the focus has been extended to other areas of discrimination, from racism to discrimination for health reasons, different learning rhythms, abilities, etc. It has also come from specific interventions with students, to more comprehensive projects that work with the entire educational community, including teachers, families, and other school professionals such as free time educators. Since 2016 there has been a stable team that meets periodically to give shape to the project and nourish it from the experiences we are acquiring in the application of our work. This one is formed by Noemí Canelles, Joana Bou, Lídia Casanovas, Sara Carro and myself.

This work is nourished by the result of all the work that we have been doing together during the years, for this I am deeply grateful to my colleagues for this trajectory and their contributions. And at the same time, I am very happy, because this project means a great contribution to Fil a l'agulla.

## **1.2. Who is the work aimed at?**

The examples of this work are based in Catalonia, Spain. Although the reality of bullying is international and can happen all over the world, I have based my professional experience in the province of Barcelona and the cultural context of this territory.

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<sup>3</sup>This project consisted of several workshops with groups of young people between 12 and 14 years old, in which we worked on the relationship between them and their tutors based on dynamics and games.



This work is aimed at people from the extensive Process Work community or people with motivation to learn more about Process Work, as well as professionals and people from the formal and informal educational world interested in the subject of bullying and discrimination in a broad sense.

I have tried to use a language that is understandable to all audiences.

### **1.3. Process Work**

I discovered Process Work through a workshop on facilitation with José Luis Escorihuela in 2006, and in 2011 I started the Diploma in Process Oriented Psychology or Process Work. At that time I felt the need to delve into working with groups and in facilitation, and I found in the Process Work the opportunity to learn a framework and a way of working that met my needs.

Something I am passionate about is that it is a framework of work and at the same time a methodology that can be applied in many fields, from personal psychology, to world work and international conflicts and that its multidisciplinary nature allows it to establish links with many and varied disciplines, from physics, systemic thinking, Taoism and Shamanism, to different strains of psychology, among others.

Its objective is awareness, and it is from there that a transformation can take place. Part of the principle is that we can get something useful out of all experiences, and it has an ateleological approach which seeks to find the reason behind those experiences that challenge us or that are difficult.

Arnold Mindell, physicist and Jungian analyst, developed this discipline in the 70's. Since then it has been a discipline in constant development in which many people have participated to expand the theoretical and practical knowledge of Process Work throughout the world.

#### **1.4. Goals of the project**

The goal of this project is to learn more deeply about the dynamics of bullying from a multidimensional perspective based on Process Oriented Psychology. Process Work has helped me to put on other glasses with which to see and observe what I experienced and what I now see in schools, and this helps me to re-evaluate my experience, learn from it and be able to accompany other children in their own experiences. Thanks deeply to Arnold Mindell and all his colleagues and my teachers.

I trust that this work can help others to understand more deeply the dynamics of bullying and facilitate the intervention from this perspective.

A second purpose of the work is to present a methodology: Word Circles. For years, we have been working with the Fil a l'agulla education team in primary and secondary schools, implementing this method to work on bullying on a personal, relational and group level.

This school year 2017-2018 our proposal has been to evaluate a project in a school consisting of several interventions in class and teacher training, with the intention that they appropriate the tools and the framework to implement it. So, the third part of the project includes the presentation and evaluation of that experience in school, "M" in Barcelona.

## 2. Bullying explained through Process Work: theoretical framework

### 2.1. What is Bullying?

M. Garaigordobil defines bullying as a specific form of continual school violence between peers, in which one or more aggressors with greater power and intention to cause pain have subjected a weaker schoolmate to violence. The main features are <sup>4</sup>:

- The place where it occurs: it is related to the school environment. In Primary Education<sup>5</sup> (from 6 to 12 years) the most risky space is the playground, while in Secondary School (12 years upward) the risk places are diversified, increasing the abuse rates in the corridors and classrooms. In recent years, violent behavior has also increased through social networks, which can happen outside of school hours and school center. It is what is called cyberbullying.
- Prolonged in time: studies talk about bullying when the behavior is repeated more than once a week and in the same month. Therefore, it is systematic and not punctual behavior. This affects the impact on the person, since the pain is sustained over time and there is the implicit threat in the victim to remain the target.
- Among equals: behavior that occurs between students that are peers and they have the same role within the hierarchy of the educational system. It usually happens between people of the same class.
- With a difference of power between the one who is assaulted and the one who suffers: the one who assaults has more strength of a physical, psychological or social nature and the possibilities of defense of the victim are reduced. This factor

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<sup>4</sup>The information comes from the book of M. Garaigordobil "Violence between equals", based on studies in different countries. The data reflects common trends in the different cases investigated.

<sup>5</sup>The education system in Spain:

- Pre-school: between 0 and 6 years, of a non-mandatory nature.
- Primary education: between 6 and 12 years old. Mandatory and consists of six courses.
- Compulsory secondary education (known as ESO in Spain): consists of four courses, with an age range of approximately 12 and 16 years.
- Post-compulsory secondary education and higher education: in which there are several independent options. It is not mandatory.

is key to differentiate it from a case of conflict between equals, where both parties have the capacity to manage the situation and have sufficient support from the group.

- The group as a witness: the presence of a third party is key in this dynamic. The group allows the dynamic to continue if it does nothing to stop it. The group creates the difference in power, reinforcing a dynamic between the center and the margin, what is more or less valued and also supports this type of behavior, adding to the aggression at times and other times allowing it through inaction and passivity.
- The forms: types of violent behavior that occur.
  - Physical: against the body, such as hitting, pushing, etc. and / or against property, such as theft, breaking or messing objects, etc.
  - Verbal: behaviors such as insults, nicknames, speaking ill of someone, teasing ...
  - Social: behaviors in which one isolates and excludes someone, such as not letting them participate in games.
  - Psychological: are those behaviors that affect self-esteem and create insecurity and fear. Bearing in mind that all other types also have psychological components.

Only 10% of the most typical bullying is physical. The most common is verbal. Gender<sup>6</sup> differences are also observed, with the most common behavior in boys being verbal aggression and direct physical aggression, and in girls, indirect aggression, such as speaking badly of others or excluding them.

The ages in which there is more prevalence and more cases identified are in 6th grade (11-12 years) and 1º ESO (12-13 years). There are no differences according to the type of school or social class. If gender differences are observed, people identified socially as boys have greater participation as aggressors and as victims.

The latest Survey on School Coexistence and Safety in Catalonia (ECESC, 2011-2012), done with secondary school students, shows that almost 15% of students are involved in

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<sup>6</sup>I refer to boys and girls who are identified by their physical appearance and thus treated socially according to that gender. These studies do not reflect all existing gender diversity.

continued negative actions or alleged harassment, whether victims, aggressors or reactive victims (that is, they receive or infringe some form of violence).

## **2.2. Was I bullied or not?: the three levels of reality**

Having a definition of bullying and mechanisms, such as victimization questionnaires, to detect it, is useful to point out an attitude that is harmful to the people who are part of it. Being aware of it and identifying it is the first step to be able to do something. But it is not always enough. Because on the one hand it is not always easy to identify this dynamic and accept it, and on the other hand because it hides other dynamics that also occur and that are not equally recognized.

To fully understand this question, the concept of the 3 realities coined by A. Mindell is very useful. In Process Work we say that reality can be experienced from 3 different realities, all important and necessary and that occur at the same time.

In consensus reality, the definition I made before about bullying fits. They are the experiences that can be measured, observed, that are tangible and visible. In my case, to know if I suffered bullying or not from this framework of reality I would ask who the aggressors were, what happened, when it happened and how often, etc.

I don't remember any aggressors, though I remember specific events such as when they hid my shoes or they locked me in a closet with another boy, but I do not know when or how often those things happened. So, from this dimension of reality, I did not suffer bullying.

Now, from dreamland, which is a more subjective level of reality, my experience is different. I don't have good feelings about that time. I felt alone and I felt that something or someone was isolating me. At that level I did feel like a victim and there were one or more aggressors, not always the same person, not even sometimes as someone tangible, but rather feelings or beliefs that oppressed me and made me feel bad, like an internal aggressor in my own head.

Recognizing both experiences as real helps me to give a space to that important stage of my life, to recognize it and to be able to respond more calmly when they ask me if I suffered bullying or not, because despite the answer I give, the important thing for me is

that I can validate my own subjective experience. Because, although at the level of consensus reality I did not suffer bullying, at dreamland that was my experience.

And here is one of the difficulties and challenges, because in our Western culture, **consensus reality is more valued and, therefore, is what is used to measure reality. Hence, the challenge is to also appreciate the subjective experience as real**, because it is my internal experience and this has affected and still affects my experiences, how I perceive the world and how I relate to others.

The third level of reality is essence, that in which we feel the relationship and connection with something bigger than us, where there are no polarities or conflicts and there is only something that contains everything. Goodbread (2010) says that as a psychotherapist he has been trained to look for the totality of the person, the connection with the spirit or soul and that that gives them a spiritual rank. And although now I'm not talking about power, but of experiencing reality from that essence level, what he says helps me to see how in my case, my own training in Process Work and my own personal development helps me at times to experiment with what I experienced from that totality, seeing bullying as part of the whole. And it is from here, from a place where there are more sensations than words, that I can approach bullying from detachment, a distance that brings me closer to the simple and complex, to the whole, and this gives me a perspective that helps me to facilitate the dynamics from a deeper understanding of the interrelation of all the parties involved.

### **2.3. No, there is no bullying here: conflicting with the conflict**

It wasn't until the early 70's that bullying began to be investigated, initially in Scandinavia, and in the 80's the first studies appeared (Rose, 2009). The different studies conducted at different times show that the phenomenon has not changed substantially (the number of cases is similar), however, in recent years, in Catalonia, bullying has generated a growing concern in educational environments and even a wider social level. It has gone from the invisibility of many abuses, to the adoption and generalization of the word bullying in the media, social networks and academic areas. Likewise, the Survey on School Coexistence and Safety in Catalonia (ECESC, 2011-2012) shows an increase, on the part of the students, of the perception of the global phenomenon of peer abuse. This view is not associated

with any increase in the cases known in the class group itself, but responds to an increase in general awareness and sensibility.

In the construction of the discourse against bullying, different roles have been fundamental, such as the LGTBIQ<sup>7</sup> movement, which from the social sciences and activism has made homophobic bullying visible, the pressure of families with children who suffer harassment has increased, the development of the Law 11/2014, (October 10th), to guarantee the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and to eradicate homophobia, biphobia and transphobia in Catalonia and the proposed law against hate crime in 2016 at the level of the Spanish State, and the impact of different cases in the media and on social networks, such as the viralization of witnesses on YouTube and the mobilizations generated for cases of suicide. Thus, social movements, academic and institutional spheres, and the media have come together in a discourse of rejection and demand for action.<sup>8</sup>

This concern about bullying, however, has had contradictory effects on the educational community. The rejection and condemnation associated with the word bullying has led many establishments not wanting to be associated, since having and recognizing a case of bullying can lead to media attention, conflicts between different parties and a stigmatizing of the establishment. Therefore, bullying has become somewhat taboo for primary and secondary schools.

We say that there is no bullying for fear of rejection, for fear that we are not doing things right, that families will complain and leave the school... Schools, like teachers, have a lot of pressure to be exemplary and not make mistakes. In addition, there are two other key factors that make bullying difficult to recognize. On the one hand, many of the best known cases are the most severe cases, such as the case of Alan, a transgender teenager from Rubí who committed suicide in December 2015. Therefore, when the word bullying appears, the imagination goes looking for these references, which are a minority. On the other hand, there is a widespread belief that if the school has a good pedagogical model there will be no bullying in the classroom. And, applying the same law in reverse, a school where there is bullying is a bad school with bad educators. There are several studies that show that different educational practices such as more democratic styles of leadership

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<sup>7</sup>The initials LGTBIQ stand for Lesbian, Gay, Trans (Transexual, Transgender and Transvestism), Bisexual, Intersexual and Queer. Queer is a term coined by Judith Butler to give name to the lack of definition in terms of sexual identity, orientation and desire.

<sup>8</sup> Reflections of the team of Fil a l'agulla

reduce victimization rates, improving coexistence among students. However, this does not mean that this type of behavior does not occur in this type of school, what surely changes is that it is detected early on and intervened in. And this is what makes the difference. The problem is not that there is bullying, it is that it is not properly intervened in order to turn that experience into a learning opportunity.

**When bullying is denied in an educational center, it is useful to know what they are negating, what they say is not happening, and to know what the school, the families and the teachers are afraid of.** Recognizing the experience with which the school is identified is going to make the path easier to then learn about other more unknown aspects, and to accept the yes, which is what is happening and is difficult to recognize.

#### **2.4. Here there is no bullying, but ...**

The fear of bullying means that there is some obsession to determine if the problems of the educational centers deserve the label or not. If it is bullying, the educational community mobilizes as best it can, but if it is not, in some way the required attention is not given to it. And as it turns out that not all cases of violence and harassment occur in a prolonged manner over time, or do not meet all the requirements to enter the category of bullying, many cases of violent behavior remain without being identified and managed. Inaction, secrecy, and errors in diagnosis mean many aggressions between equals are trivialized in schools and institutes. "In our center there is no bullying, but ..." It is this "but" that shows a field that must be identified and transformed.



## 2.5. The systemic perspective: the roles in the bullying system

Bullying is a dynamic that happens in the school environment, among students. And although two main actors intervene, the aggressor and the victim, there is a third key actor: the witness. When there is someone marginalized, the class knows it, and it is a group dynamic in which all the people in the group intervene.

This is so because it is the group that unconsciously defines the positional or contextual power (I will discuss this more in detail later), which determines that certain attitudes, ways of behaving, dressing, hobbies, etc. are more valued than others. These type of values are also influenced by social power, that which is most valued in our Western majority society. And therefore, this type of power influences in defining who in a class has more positional power and can potentially be an aggressor and who less and can potentially be a victim.

On one hand, it is this way because of the field theory and roles and the theory of the system. Systems theory, developed by Bertalanffy in the 1940s, defines a system as a set of elements in dynamic interaction. By the property of totality, the elements of a system are in such a relationship that the modification of an element or some relation within the system causes the modification of the whole system.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, in psychology the concept of field from physics is used to describe the group fields as dynamic fields in which the parts interrelate. A. Mindell (2000) says that the organization constitutes a field that manifests itself in physical structures, human feelings, a particular atmosphere and specific jobs and roles. The field creates and organizes the group as much as people organize it and expresses itself through beliefs, creating group and individual identities. If the field is congruent, what the group believes and does is identical. But more often than not it is not like that, the group is immersed in a sea of information, a sea of signals that has an impact, but whose impact is rejected.

A principle that has a direct relationship with the Process Work is that the information can not be lost or destroyed, but remains in the system or in the field. Therefore, once issued, a signal will persist until it is consciously collected and used as an intervention. Diamond<sup>10</sup> says such a system will continue to broadcast signals until the system changes. This is the principle of conservation of information, which postulates a universal impulse or intent of information to reach consciousness.

In a Barcelona Secondary School, there was a case of bullying in a class. The faculty team detected it and invited the main aggressor to leave the institute and when she left, another person took his place. This is a good example of the systemic dimension of the dynamics of

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<sup>9</sup> [http://perso.wanadoo.es/nicanorap/apunt\\_terap\\_famil\\_2.htm](http://perso.wanadoo.es/nicanorap/apunt_terap_famil_2.htm)

bullying and of one of the principles of role theory: when a person stops occupying the role, if the dynamics have not been fully processed or the relationships worked through, looking at the messages and the useful essence of the role, the role can be occupied by another person.

Mindell (2004) defines role as that position or point of view that depends on the time and space, which can be represented by different people and parts over time and remain in a permanent state of flux.

From this perspective, we can say that groups where there is bullying are incongruous systems, in that it is not part of their beliefs that bullying serves the development and learning of students, however it exists, and this constellates in the group certain roles: aggressor, victim and witness. **As they are roles in the system, everyone has the capacity to occupy them.** Sometimes, whoever has more tendency to a role due to their personal experience among other factors, is the first occupy it.

Taking this perspective into account is also understanding that **people are much more than the role they occupy in the group.** One of the biggest conflicts in groups is when you stop seeing that, and you only see the person as the role they occupy. This is harmful for the person and for the group, because the group also loses the opportunity to learn from each role. Therefore, a child aggressor will not always be an aggressor, he also occupies other roles. What happens is that sometimes these other roles go unnoticed or not recognized.

Here we have another example of shifting roles. In a primary school in Barcelona there was a girl who was a leader in her group and represented the values most desired by the group, probably unconsciously. She did not make good use of her power, leaving other people out. After a year, these people, resentful of the accumulated pain, began to marginalize her, making her the scapegoat of the group. In this case, the girl went from the role of aggressor to the role of victim in the same group.

## **2.6. The role of the aggressor**

The role of the aggressor is someone with power that misuses his power, even abusing when the victim is not able to defend himself. J. Goodbread (2010) says that **conflict becomes abuse when an opponent uses so much strength, either physical or psychological, that the other person cannot defend himself.**

Often the aggressors represent values of the contextual rank of the group and the group follows them and supports their actions. On other occasions, they exert power in a coercive

way, exerting fear in the group, as in the case of a 6th grade child (12 years old) who threatened his group not to include another child in the WhatsApp group of the whole class.

One difficulty with the role of the aggressor is that it is very difficult to identify with it and acknowledge it. In over 30 talks that I have given to families on the subject, there have been only two mothers who have spoken of their children as aggressors and in workshops with children, on rare occasions, some people ask for forgiveness. Admitting it, says Goodbread (2010) is like scolding yourself for having such a terrible characteristic, as bullying is despised by most people, it is almost impossible to admit it. Also, there is the added difficulty that when you reprimand yourself, you affect your own power, diminishing it, and that is like a way of hitting oneself, of becoming bullied. This explains what happens at the institution level and the difficulty on the part of the teaching staff and management team to admit that there is a situation of bullying in the educational center. **So, a challenge in the intervention of bullying is to work with the negative attitudes to this behavior, to reduce the extreme image that makes it difficult to acknowledge it.**

One way to explain that the aggressor persists in his behavior is that this behavior is addictive, it seeks to satisfy a longing, and although momentarily there may be a small satisfaction, it is not sustainable and that causes it to be repeated again and again. Goodbread (2010) says that when conflict avoids its real victim, it risks becoming addictive. You can get a temporary satisfaction out of rage with someone allegedly weaker and have the opportunity to connect with your own power, but this does not last. But when the conflict with the wrong person begins, this solution cannot be satisfactory in the long term, because it does not direct the initial conflict and stimulates more and more acts of abuse.

At a school in Esplugues, in a 1st grade class (6 years old), a teacher told me that there was a girl who was harassing another boy and was constantly making comments about his glasses. They knew that this was happening because the child did not want to go to school. When the teacher spoke with the (aggressor) girl's family, she discovered that she had suffered the previous year, being the victim of another aggressor. The girl did not have the capacity to face her real conflict, she felt helpless, and the following year she refocused her situation with a new victim, seeking to satisfy some unfulfilled need, as a way to also connect with her own power.

**One way to go to the root is to know what that real conflict is that you want to face, but because you have the feeling that you cannot, you do it with the wrong victim. And to know what it is that you are longing for, what is that unmet need that you are looking for in an addictive way.**

Another key factor that can lead us to bullying is not identifying with our deep source of power. **Underestimating one's own power is the origin of bullying, since someone who is**

**weaker is abused, instead of dealing with the opponent that really needs facing** (Goodbread, 2010). So, when you do not identify with your power, and, in addition, have been a victim of abuse in other situations, you can potentially occupy the role of aggressor.

## 2.7. The role of the victim

The role of the victim is the role of the person who suffers violent behavior repeatedly over time, who can not defend themselves and has less positional power in the group.

Two types of victim roles are described:

- Passive victim: they don't defend themselves actively. They are the most common cases, probably because they are the best known and easiest to identify.
- Active victim: they use aggression as a defense method. In this case, the intervention is more complex, since its isolation is justified by its behavior, stating sentences such as "you are looking for it". I remember a case in a secondary school, there was a boy of 1<sup>o</sup> ESO (13 years old) who had been suffering from isolation since primary school. He sometimes hid school supplies from his classmates and beat them on the back to interact with them. And although their friends related to each other in the same way, they didn't like his behavior, and thus justified his exclusion. In the workshop, we were trying to make this dynamic apparent and it really was very difficult. It is one of the most difficult cases to address.

**Due to the systematic violence they receive, the victim internalizes the aggression by internalizing the role of the aggressor. So, they end up having two aggressors, the external and the internal.**

Another common factor that makes the situation more serious is that there comes a time when the dynamics continue and are not curbed, and **the person feels guilty and responsible for what is happening to them**, what is called introjection of the blame. The effects on the person can be traumatic. Emotional well-being suffers, often resulting in shame, depression, hopelessness, anger ... and in the worst cases there may be suicidal or self-injurious thoughts and suicide.

All this, together with the difficulty of expressing vulnerability, makes the victim isolate himself and not communicate to his social network what is happening. A child in 6th grade (12 years old) in a school in Castellbisbal, said in a letter that he did not want to tell his parents that he was suffering on the path to school, because he did not want them to suffer.

This makes it more difficult to identify bullying. Some of the common signals to identify it from the role of the victim, are usually:

- behavioral factors such as not wanting to go to school, increase or decrease in focus on studies, etc.
- or emotional signals such as depression, irrational fears, aggressiveness at home, mood swings ...

But the person who is suffering rarely explains it, the most common behavior is the isolation of the victim and this makes the situation more serious, since it is more difficult to identify the dynamics and therefore help the sufferer.

I remember that, in my case, I locked myself in, I did not tell my parents what was happening to me, although they did see that I was unhappy and that I did not have friends. Their way of helping me was to provide me with another environment, so I changed schools and youth clubs<sup>11</sup>. I remember that I cried a lot and they criticized me for that. Over time I have learned to value that sensitivity and now it's part of one of my greatest qualities. I cry easily when I empathize with someone or get emotional about something.

**To help those who are in the role of the victim, the key is to confront the internal aggressor.**

A father told me that his daughter believed that she was stupid, as she had been told so many times and in the end, it turned out that she had dyslexia and until this was detected it had affected her learning. When they discovered the motive, it helped them to counteract that negative image of herself, in short, to connect with her personal power.

It is also important to be able to work with that feeling of guilt, and working with relationships at group level can help this, so that the sufferer can see that there are also external roles of aggressor or witness who are causing pain, and if they take responsibility, the sufferer can stop feeling guilty.

Finally, I think it is crucial to work at the social level with vulnerability. It is important that all of us learn to connect with our vulnerability, and not punish the emotional expressions of sadness, despair, etc. This implies a change of belief systems in some cases, and also doing personal work. Parenting a suffering child is recognizing your own suffer, separating it from your child's, so that he / she is able to express what is happening to them, and seek support from you.

## 2.8. The role of the witness

The role of the witness is the role of the one who is in the situation, observes it and does nothing to stop it. Sometimes they even add to the aggression, laughing or hurling insults or derogatory comments, isolating the person, etc.

When you ask them why they don't do anything to stop it, they answer that they are afraid to be on the receiving end, to be excluded. Therefore, for them it is better to support the aggressor, than to go against them. Curiously, there are few times when they think that supporting the victim may be another way to intervene. Once, a mother started crying because her daughter was being marginalized by the group because she was supporting the victim. In the same room was the victim's mother, who thanked her daughter for supporting her. This girl was someone with a lot of personal power, capable of holding her own, although this went against how the majority of the group acted and she thus became set apart by the rest. **Therefore, the role of the witness is that of the person who follows the leader and unconsciously reinforces a majority value and a static power dynamic, allowing there to be an aggressor and a victim.**

It is a key role in the dynamics of bullying, for the reasons that I have already explained and because of the simple fact that observers in a violent dynamic change and transform the act and the way of perceiving it. In adolescence, it is typical for kids to fight out of school, and when this happens it happens with an audience, which has been previously invited and that also encourages them. Viewers reinforce the dynamics, affect them and are also affected by them. And this is also important, because **not only the victim and the aggressor suffer, but also those who observe, encourage and support suffer**. Sometimes they suffer coercion and direct threats from those who attack, or indirectly due to fear of being separated from the group, the discomfort of witnessing an act of violence, the pain due to the suffering of others, etc. And if they do not intervene in the dynamics they learn that by attacking you can achieve status and power.

There is a widespread belief that makes it difficult for anyone who observes: "If you sneak you are a traitor". A teacher at a school worked on this belief by counteracting the reasons why somebody is a telltale, or someone explains to an adult what they are observing. She said that it was necessary to differentiate who was "telling" to hurt the person from who was "telling" as an act of justice and solidarity. To transform things, it was necessary to denounce unfair acts.

## 2.9. Other roles and the relationship between them

Menken (2013) says that any social history reveals four main roles that are present: victim, oppressor, witness and facilitator. While the first three roles are very common, that of the facilitator is rarely present. This is the role of those who help people to work through differences or conflict, who are able to listen deeply, encourage interactions between polarities and lead through encouraging better relationships and building community.

In Process Work we talk about ghost roles as those roles that are part of the system, but that are not present, no one in the group represents them. In the bullying dynamic, there is a big ghost role, the role of the person who stops it, who says enough and who does something to change the situation. There are many ways to carry out this role. We could say that there are as many as people in the group. It could also be the role of the facilitator, or the role of elder. The elder, an ancient Chinese concept, is one who follows the direction of nature, and who is able to welcome all roles to explore the essence in them and favor dialogue, at different levels of reality. The role of the elder is based on the basic principle of deep democracy, which means being aware of the diversity of people, roles and feelings, as a collective attitude that recognizes that all roles and points of view are not only necessary, but that they need to be recognized, respected and interact with each other so that the wisdom and integrity of the realm emerges (Mindell, 2014).

There are other roles that are present but rarely expressed, for example the role of pain, injury, fears, etc. None of the people who occupy the three roles mentioned above, usually express pain, difficult experiences, fears ...

And there are also others that influence the dynamic of bullying, making it more difficult to resolve them, such as the role of the critic, who makes judgments, who denies the experience of bullying by saying that "*it's normal, they are kids*", etc. (other examples of critical voices are specified in section 2.11).

Another basic idea is identity. Process Work describes identity as a particular and momentary configuration of consciousness, in which the person or group identifies with something and the "other" is what momentarily disturbs their identity. With what is identified is defined as a primary process or primary identity or "u" and the "other", who disturbs is the secondary process, the secondary identity or "x". The goal of this framework is to bring the secondary information into the field of our identity, expanding it, because it is understood that what we believe is not "us" is also "us" and can be fluid among the given identities. The change comes by changing the relationships and attitudes with what bothers us, and by finding the essence useful in those that bother us, the "x". (Diamond)

Identity is structured by a belief system. When the belief system becomes too one-sided, the unconscious is likely to challenge that, manifesting something that creates disturbance (Rose, 2009).

From this perspective, there are more primary roles for the group and the people in the group. The role of the aggressor is usually a more secondary role because it is more difficult to identify with it because of everything we have said before, but this changes moment by moment. And in addition, all the roles are also in the internal psychology of people, so that when someone is attacking they can momentarily identify with the role of the aggressor and that of the victim will be more secondary. Menken (2013) points out that identifying with only one role makes you lose the totality and the opportunity to learn from other roles. Understanding that anyone can be any of the different roles supports the development of compassion towards others.

In working with Word Circles in schools, the role of victim is often more clearly visible, several people in the group identify with the role and express something more secondary, their pain. When this happens, and the aggressor sees it, he momentarily occupies the role of the witness, and observes that situation and this is the opportunity to develop the role of who stops and says enough. In a school in El Prat de Llobregat this happened, when a girl expressed her suffering for being criticized on her physical appearance, another child went to her at playtime and apologized to her.

## **2.10. Power and rank dynamics**

We have already been talking about power and the importance of this element in the dynamics of bullying, and now I will explain a little more. For this it is useful to differentiate the types of power. Diamond (2016), distinguishes the social power from personal power. The first is external and is given by the environment, while the second is a self-generated power that can be inalienable to any context and situation, you just have to cultivate it and learn to be in contact with it even in the midst of conflict.

Before (point 2.5.), I have named positional or contextual power. This is a type of social power, which has to do with the most immediate context, the class group itself and is defined by the group's value system. It is key to explain the dynamics between the center and the margin, between what is most valued and less and, therefore, between the people of the class who are more "leaders" and those who are in the "margins" and therefore potential aggressors and victims.



Diamond (2016) explains in her book "Power, a user's guide" how power makes people corrupt. One of the reasons is the difficulty of dealing with emotions. She says that **high rank gives afford us an opportunity to satisfy personal needs by managing others instead of managing our emotions.** This can momentarily alleviate, but it entails a cost in your development when you hurt someone for the misuse of your power and you become an aggressor. And, in addition, when the source of power is external, a dependency is created, as in an addiction. Without an internal resource of self-esteem and personal power, the person becomes more dependent. In this case, social power is like a substance, a shortcut to feeling better.

For this reason, among others, she says that the recipe against abuses of power is more power (personal). Personal power can also be of two types; psychological power and spiritual power, which has to do with the connection with something transpersonal, which goes beyond the person. Psychological power derives from personal experiences and is cultivated by doing personal work, it has to do with personal and social skills, with resilience and self-esteem.

Before I have explained how underestimating one's own power can lead to conflicts with the wrong person, looking for an easier target with whom to unload the emotions that you can not manage with the person with whom you should have the conflict.

And finally, another key aspect in this dynamic is that not having social power is frowned upon and not valued, so it is very difficult to appreciate and recognize what it means to have low rank. Diamond (2016) comments that, to be more connected to your power, **it is important to love your low rank and embrace your vulnerability.** The inviolable force comes from the complacency of having nothing to lose and that the challenges of low rank are the source of some of the larger forces and powers. It can allow you to take risks, because you have little to lose, and it helps you to be more compassionate with the role of your own victim and of others.

**To be able to move between roles with and without power, helps emotional and social development,** it helps to know how others feel and to have more relational tools. This increases awareness and the ability to make good use of power.

## **2.11. The intra-psychic perspective: belief systems and critics**

A very important factor in the development of conflict and bullying is the intra-psychic perspective, since it amplifies the phenomenon making it more harmful. In addition to external conflicts, we conflict internally through self-critical thoughts that come from patterns learned in the social or family environment. In Process Work they are called internal critics

and they differ from other psychological currents in that it is understood that they bring potentially useful information (Straub, 1990)

Critics can be figures at the edge. The edge structures the identity of the person, relationships and groups and is defined by the belief system. The essential characteristic of the critic is that it leads to negative self-construction and judgments. It is a figure that changes moment by moment.

The critic becomes an inner aggressor, causing the person to identify himself as the victim, the one who suffers from that aggression. In this way, we can say that bullying reproduces internally, especially when this dynamic continues over time - we do not defend ourselves and we are not able to understand the useful message of the critic.

Sometimes the external dynamic of bullying stops, but the internal dynamic continues and can continue for years and years. Working with the critic or inner aggressor can be a way to process traumatic events from the past, which are still alive at the internal subjective level, at dreamland level.

I have worked on several occasions with my memories of my time at school, about those events that I mentioned previously. And in this process, I became aware of my own internal critics. In my case, a sentence that hurts me, is "You did not do anything to stop it". Even when I write it now, I need to go slowly, I notice that I get emotional and that the message is difficult for me. It is difficult because it feeds the guilt (it is the introjection of the guilt that I mentioned in section 2.7.), At the same time it can also have a useful message. When I am able to remove the grain from the straw, to defend myself from the part that crushes me and hurts me and to be compassionate with the girl at the time who did the best she could, after this and a lot of personal work, I can be calmer with what happened and ask myself about my resources, my strategies and that this helps me connect with my personal power.

This is an example of what I was saying before, the critic brings potentially useful information. Often it is not easy to identify it, sometimes that information is not even in the content, but **working with this internal dynamic is a very important way to manage bullying among people externally.** Working with internal critics can be like working with accusations: be aware of the damage, defend yourself and recognize the part of truth that you have. Furthermore, in this case it will also be interesting to recognize the useful essence of the critic's role, which may be in the content or in his/her/it behavior or energy.

**It's not only the role of victim that has critics, as we mentioned before each role has its own,** which make us to continue acting in a certain way reinforcing the harmful dynamics.

These critics are voices that reinforce belief systems, and some of them are sometimes limiting. Some examples:

- Victim: *"It's not so bad, they're just jokes", "If you don't know how to defend yourself, you're a coward", "If I do something, it will be worse, better not tell anyone"*
- Aggressor: *"You do not deserve anyone to help you"*
- Witness: *"If you snitch you are a traitor", "If you get involved you will be on the receiving end and they will leave you out"*
- Adult person: *"It's children's things, it's better not to interfere"*

Colell and Escudé (2004), have collected a set of typical ideas and beliefs of bullying that feed their own harmful dynamics. In my experience working with adults I have observed that they correspond to questions and comments typical of parents, educators and teachers.

1. The abuse is only "jokes", "kids' things", and it is better not to get involved.
2. The victim looks for trouble, he deserves it.
3. The abuse is part of growth, character forming.
4. The best way to defend yourself is to return it.
5. Abuse is a boys' thing (not girls).
6. Only children who have family problems or who live in slums attack.
7. The victims are wimpy and weak people.
8. When children fight, it is better not to get involved and to keep in a neutral position.
9. Punish the children who attack, so they will stop doing it.
10. Only the victim needs help.

## **2.12. Violence**

Much violent behavior is normalized in educational institutions. When it happens it's not seen, it's not recognized and there is no intervention. Among the different acts of violence, the most recognized are the physical violence, and the least are those of verbal or social violence. And yet the most recurrent acts are insults, isolating people and leaving them out, derogatory comments, ridicule, etc. These attitudes are less visible, because they are not seen as easily as a slap in the face would be, and they are also more socially accepted. Who has not heard two unknown people in the street insulting each other, or making derogatory comments? Often in the workshops with families I talk about violence in the system. I give an example to people who occupy public political positions - if there is violence in the system, how is there not going to be in the schools? The school is a reflection of our society - if as adults we do not know how to manage conflicts without violence, children know even less.

Furthermore, it is common to observe that there is something in violent attitudes that attracts us. For example, when teenagers observe a fight and encourage their instigators, or when we

aggressor and to focus more on it, laughing and supporting their performance, than on the role of the victim. This is because it involves a sense of contact with power. Rose (2009) says that rage, violence, rebellion, oppression and many other similar dynamics are closely connected with power and revenge. For those who are powerless, violent or vengeful acts are often the means used to reestablish strength and find a position of power within a situation of helplessness.

It has also been seen that aggressive acts can be a desperate way to try to make contact with others. This is a common case in the role of aggressive victims. I remember a case of a 3rd grade girl (8 years old), she was physically older than the rest of her class and she was looking for all possible ways to be friends and get close to a particular girl in the group, a girl who had a group of friends. She used the aggressive acts to get closer and what she was looking for was contact and relationship.

Rose (2009) in her book on "School Violence" says that violence and aggression are usually seen as something bad and this causes them to be repressed and punished. And the more it is repressed, the more forceful it comes out again exploding in more destructive ways. As it is difficult to recognize it in oneself, it is easier to project it in others. However, she proposes that by doing this, we miss **the opportunity to learn something, an underlying message with these acts that may be important for the development of the person and the group.** This is the teleological perspective, which suggests exploring the disturbance to access its meaning from a deeper level of consciousness.

*In this case, Rose says, "Not only violence leads to the appreciation of care and friendship, but also connects with a higher spiritual meaning, linking those who share the experience with each other. In this context, violence can be seen as a necessary natural force, cultivating a new creativity and connection in its consequences. If education included knowledge of these dynamics, and children were guided and encouraged to deal with these forces both within themselves and within others, the repression of these factors would be greatly diminished. Destructive forces could be disarmed and their essential qualities could be used creatively, lovingly and meaningfully. Without this process, it is not surprising that destructive impulses explode unexpectedly to create chaos and devastation within the school environment. "*

But for this to happen, as she points out, an accompaniment that supports this expression in a useful sense is necessary. Providing a vessel so that this can be expressed and recognized relieves the person and the group field and highlights the symptom of the system to be able to intervene in it. In fact, only being able to talk about it freely relieves the system and reduces the need to act with violence. Being able to share experiences is especially useful to dispel the alienation and feel a sense of connection with others.

### 2.13. Multilevel intervention: intrapersonal, relational and systemic

There is a tendency to limit the intervention to a personal level, working only with the people and families supposedly affected, that is, the victim and the aggressor, separately, without working on the relationship. It is not so usual to imply the global nature of the educational community: class groups, families as a whole, non-teaching staff ... This option responds to a concept of bullying that is very limited by the punitive and sanctioning vision of the aggressor, to the detriment of theoretical perspectives that assume that all elements of the system must be present in the resolution of the conflict. It is a dynamic that affects everyone and it is especially important to propose interventions at multiple levels. Process Work sees **the group as a multilevel phenomenon that includes individual, relational and group work and believes that all are necessary, important and complementary** (Diamond and Summers).

- Individual intervention: people need individual support to relate to their edges and their internal aggressors, the critics. Many individual interventions focus on the experience of victims, but it is also extremely important to explore the personal psychology of aggressors, witnesses and other people from the educational community, as well as the person in the role of facilitation, to be more aware of their own internal critics, limiting beliefs and how this affects the way they intervene (see more in section 2.14.).
- Relational intervention: a group is formed by relationships, it is important to cultivate them and this is done by relating to each other, working through the accusations and getting to know each other ... In addition, bullying is a dynamic that occurs in relationships, that is why it is also important to work on them. This can help, for example, the victim and the abuser recognize the damage and repair it and restore the relationship if it's not too damaged.
- Group intervention: sometimes sub-groups are formed within affinity groups, and among them there are power dynamics. It is important to work on the relationship between subgroups and work at the role level. Working at the group level is also working on conflict at a systemic level, processing the dynamics of bullying between the different roles that exist, regardless of who occupies them. This involves working with the classmates, as well as with families, teachers and other people who are part of the educational community.

The authors also say that to work with a group it is important to identify at what level the problem is evident, as this will be the level that needs more focus and attention. In addition, we must bear in mind that working at one level also influences and affects the other.

Rose (2009) points out that, in the long term, to achieve sustainable change, it is useful for transformation to occur at all levels. If an individual undergoes a change and then returns to

a system that remains unchanged, regression may occur. So, the more levels that are represented, the more is achieved.

A topic can be processed in a particular group and then that process can continue in other groups, when the issue reappears. In the same way, the conscience that is born at the group level, can follow on a personal level, internally, or with other people that are not directly related to the topic. This helps take the issue further. On more than one occasion, in the workshops I have done, they have told me things that came up afterwards. In a school in El Prat del Llobregat, a teacher told us that a child had come to the playground to apologize to a girl. And also in El Prat, a boy who was with his mother stopped us and she thanked us for what had happened in the workshop. The growth of consciousness and the new perception achieved in a group interaction is nothing more than a step in a continuous process of unfolding deeper and deeper levels of the question addressed. The growth of a new vision is, therefore, a continuous process in itself (Rose, 2009).

#### **2.14. Other key elements in intervention**

In most cases, aggressive behavior is addressed in a punitive, marginalizing and shameful manner, perpetuating and exacerbating the problem. As incidents in schools increase, more rules and restrictions are imposed on the students reducing their autonomy, and it has been shown that restricting the freedom of students as an attempt to manage violence exacerbates violence rather than reducing it. (Rose, 2009)

Mindell (2017) in his latest book on conflict says, "**solutions are crucial, but often they are not sustainable without everyone learning to relate better between each other and the issue involved**". Therefore, intervening in bullying can not be just offering solutions for people to be better, or setting standards to deal with the problem. Often, one of the solutions offered for the victim is to change schools, in some cases this helps the person, but the dynamics do not always stop. So, Mindell proposes that during the intervention we should be aware of the process itself, drawing attention to the relationships and the dialogue between the roles. This is the sustainable tool.

Values and ethical principles are what guide our actions, or should, because most of the time we forget them, we are not aware. Goodbread (2010) says that it is important to find a way to remember them for the safety of the conflict. This is equally important when we intervene in bullying. In an intervention in a school, there was a person who attacked another more marginalized person in the group. I made a sharp comment with his intervention and that, in turn, was aggressive. I was reacting, influenced by my own experience in my childhood, I acted

**guide my intervention.** When I left, I reflected on it with my colleague as she had also noticed the situation. I had felt bad, affected by how the person in question could have felt. In the next session, I apologized, and although they did not want to accept my apology, denying the seriousness of the situation, I insisted and it was an important moment in the group, there was a change of roles. I recognize the role of aggressor and he took the role of victim. My behavior modeled a way of intervening in this kind of situation. This example highlights the **importance of personal work when we intervene.** To intervene in bullying it is important to be aware of your own personal history, to know which side you empathize with more, to know the behavior and situations that bother you the most, etc. Personal work helps you to be more aware, to recognize yourself in your own dynamic, since as part of the field you can also occupy roles consciously and unconsciously, and therefore be able to intervene with awareness and in connection with your values.

### **3. Word circles: the approach to bullying in schools**

After explaining bullying from Process Workperspective, in this section I focus on the work in the classrooms with the Word Circles. The Word Circles are the main tool we use in Fil a l'agulla to work on relationships, the expression of emotions and situations of discrimination and bullying. This tool has several origins, but we have our own way of using it, and it is nurtured by the Process Work approach and this is what I want to express more concretely in this chapter.

#### **3.1. Origin of the circles**

Circles are a practice with roots in the native communities of North America where the community, sitting in a circle, dialogue to resolve conflicts. They use a talking piece, an object that passes from person to person in the circle giving each the opportunity to speak and be listened to. There are also other traditional precedents, where the use of the circle is seen as a symbolic element and a practice in communication and community work<sup>12</sup>.

Current circles combine these ancient traditions with contemporary concepts of participatory democracy and inclusion in a complex and multicultural society (Alberti, 2012).

Rul.lan (2011), in his thesis, expresses that the first experiences of restorative justice were in the 70's in Canada and the USA, hand in hand with the Mennonite Church and in New Zealand and Australia, as a result of the revaluation of the systems of traditional Maori justice.

Although the origin of restorative justice is in the criminal sphere, from the beginning there are cases in the school environment, especially with young people and problematic behavior. At the end of the 70s, CSF Buxmont, in Pennsylvania, United States, began to experiment with circles in schools (Costello and more, 2011). And in 1977, the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) was born, which broadens the knowledge and practice of restorative justice to other areas and forms a set of restorative practices. The spectrum ranges from affective statements where the victim informs his aggressor how he/she felt about the aggression, to the more structured restorative meetings and the Circle of Peace, which focuses on the conflict in various stages. There are many types of circle and they vary in their structure and format depending on the purpose they have. You can work from content of the subject, to the decision making or aspects related to the knowledge of the people,

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<sup>12</sup>An example of this is briefly described in this article that exemplifies it with cases from different cultures of



relationships and conflict resolution. Although the development of restorative practices has been going for many years, few experiences in the educational field are known in the Spanish state. The most widespread and well-known restorative practice is mediation, but usually only aggressor and victim participate in it, and there are many other practices that also include work at the group level, with the participation of other members of the community. In the Balearic Islands, an experience was developed in 2013 that worked on a community level in the Son Gotleu neighborhood in Palma de Mallorca and included the application of restorative practices in the school.<sup>13</sup>

So, we can say that the origins of the circles have two central pillars, on the one hand the tradition of indigenous community practices of different native peoples throughout the world and on the other hand the development of restorative justice from 1970.

In 2010 I discovered the circles in a training of Theatre of the Oppressed led by Aristizábal.<sup>14</sup> He presented the council circle<sup>15</sup> as a ritual element that could be used for working with young people and building on truth in the group, using the circle, a word stick and some brief slogans to guide him. From then on, Fil a l'agulla began to incorporate the Word Circle in the workshops in schools.

Later I discovered restorative justice with the International Institute for Restorative Practices. I trained in working with circles and I read a diverse bibliography on the subject. This is based on a linear conflict approach that starts from the idea of an aggressor and a victim and uses the Nonviolent Communication method developed by Rosenberg<sup>16</sup> to recognize the various needs and communicate with others in an empathic way. Nonviolent Communication focuses on three aspects: self-empathy (defined as a deep and compassionate perception of one's inner experience), empathy (understanding and sharing an emotion expressed by another) and honest self-expression (defined as expressing oneself authentically in a way that makes the compassion of others more likely).<sup>17</sup>

Since we began using these circles the framework of work in Fil a l'agulla has been Process Work, so the presentation of this methodology is based on the theoretical framework that I explained in the previous point.

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<sup>13</sup> Son Gotleu school, in Palma de Mallorca. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPWHaJT7dN8>

<sup>14</sup>Course: "Conferences for the training of youth educators. The Rainbow of Desire", in 2010 in Barcelona, Spain. The Theater of the Oppressed is a type of theater developed in the 50's in Brazil by A. Boal. Its main principle is the practice of stage art as an activity dedicated to improving the lives of less favored social groups.

<sup>15</sup>Source: <http://ojaifoundation.org/our-programs/council-in-schools>

<sup>16</sup>American psychologist who created Nonviolent Communication, known as CNV, a method to communicate and resolve conflicts. In 2006, he wrote the book "Nonviolent Communication. A language of life "

### 3.2. The restorative approach

Most schools have an approach based on the punitive management of conflicts and with a minimum participation of families and students in general. Alberti (2012) points out that most responses move between a punitive model based on punishment and a permissive model, based on non-punishment. There are studies that show that punishment is not effective, and that, often, the situation worsens. The punitive approach negatively affects the relationship between the punisher and the person punished, and teaches behavior based on the consequence, which does not encourage reflection or empowerment. On the other hand, the permissive model, with low control and high support, tends to protect the person so that he does not suffer the consequences of his actions and is not efficient either.

Costelo (2011) presents the restorative approach as an approach that adds high control to set limits and set expectations and the strong support and motivation for people to be successful and to make positive changes. He comes from the idea that people are more likely to make changes when figures in positions of authority and power do things with them, instead of against them (punitive model) or for them (permissive model).

Khan says *"I do not think the threat of jail is always effective in getting people to take responsibility for the damage they have caused. In many cases, men deny having done harm to avoid going to prison. The penal system would not have asked me what I needed to move forward with my life or how the damage he had caused me could be repaired. In addition, the penal system does not focus on rehabilitation or on helping violent people to rebuild their lives without violence. For me, it does not make sense"*.<sup>18</sup> Khan suffered partner abuse and later she met with her ex-partner to find out what she needed to be able to turn the page in that story. This is a good practical example of what the restorative approach means. Instead of focusing on what rule has been infringed, identify the culprit and specify the punishment that will be imposed, the new approach focuses on the damage and how the people directly and indirectly involved have been affected, seeking reparation and restoration of the damage and the relationship and facilitating the taking of responsibility by the aggressor. Responsibility is emphasized at two levels, taking responsibility for the facts and becoming aware of the consequences of their actions and taking responsibility for the solution (Alberti, 2012). It focuses on seeing how things can be fixed and meeting the identified needs to repair the damage. It has a community focus, since it promotes the participation of the people directly and indirectly involved and affected. It is also an approach that empowers, since it is the

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<sup>18</sup>Interview by A. Mahdawi in the digital newspaper El Diario a AttiyaKan, who made the documentary "A Better Man" from the interviews she did with her abusive ex-boyfriend <http://www.eldiario.es/theguardian/Attiva->

affected people who decide the outcome of their own story and how to manage their own recovery process.

It has three central ideas:

- Repair of material damages and restoration of current symbolic damage and reduction of future ones. It takes into account the damage to the victim, to the aggressor and to the community.
- Meeting between the parties who come together and decide for themselves.
- Transformation, causing profound changes in the participants, relationships and the community.

There are multiple experiences of restorative justice in environments of high conflict and crime cases and it has been observed that its effect increases when it is part of the community system and not a specific intervention. This approach implies a change of vision, and needs community involvement to apply it. Studies show that it reduces reoffence, being even more affective when crime involves violence against people, it increases the well-being of the victim, reducing the traumatic effects of harm and the desire for revenge, and it increases the possibilities of accepting responsibility and the ability to listen to other points of view (Rul. Ian, 2011).

Alberti (2012) observes that for the restorative management of relationships it is necessary to put into practice a series of skills such as active listening, assertive communication, empathy, creative thinking, etc. The approach includes different processes that are based on voluntary and active participation. She proposes a project that encourages the promotion of an appropriate climate that favors cooperative and positive relationships and the structural changes necessary to avoid the causes of conflicts and the learning of the necessary competences that favor the absence of violence, disruptive behavior, ill-treatment and criminal behavior.

One of the main axes on which restorative practices pivot are the restorative questions. Zehr<sup>19</sup> has developed the basic questions, with the influence of Rosenberg complimented by other authors. Alberti (2012) points out that the specific question is not as important as the relevance of structuring a communication where: all points of view are valued and included, the expression of thoughts, emotions and feelings are facilitated as well as the consideration and empathy towards others, the needs of each party are identified and there is shared responsibility in decision making.

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<sup>19</sup>Zehr is the author of the book "Changing lenses" that, in 1990, conceptualizes for the first time, the restorative

Table 1: Restorative themes and questions (Alberti, 2012)

Themes	Restorative questions
1- Appreciation of and respect towards individual perspectives.	What happened? (according to your point of view)
2- Thoughts influence emotions, emotions influence actions.	What did you think and how did you feel at that moment? How have you felt and what have you thought since then? How do you feel and what do you think now?
3- Empathy and consideration	Who has been affected and how?
4- Appreciation of individual needs	What do you need to be able to move on, resolve...and feel better? What do you need to be able to heal so that everyone can move on?
5- Shared responsibility and decision making	What do you need to happen now? How can you respond to the needs? What can we do to resolve the situation? How can we solve to these needs together?

### 3.3. The Word Circles

In Fil a l'agulla we name the circles Word Circles in order to differentiate our way of using them, which is essentially based on the framework of the Process Work. As I said before, our main source is the council circles that have their origin in the indigenous tradition, however, we have been and continue to be in contact with the circles and restorative practices in order to be nourished by the restorative approach.

For this reason, my challenge in this work has been to describe what we do, using the other references only as support. On the other hand, although we have been using circles for years, their use in relation to the work with bullying is more recent, so it is a living methodology that is also unique in each intervention, since we adapt ourselves at every moment to the process of each group. This work serves not only to systematize what we do but to advance the ideas, and most probably in writing them down new nuances will appear and be incorporated.

### 3.3.1. The intention

There are many types of circles and what differentiates them is their intention and main objective. Pranis<sup>20</sup> describes nine typologies: circles of discussion or debate, to facilitate the understanding of a fact, to give support to a person, to create community (whose objective is to create links and relationships in the group), for conflict resolution, circles for reconciliation and the reintegration of people who have been isolated, of celebration, of healing in a process of trauma or mourning (Healing Circles or Peacemaking Circles in English) or of judgment (related to criminal proceedings). In the 90s, Barter developed restorative circles that have the dual intention of creating community and managing conflicts. (Alberti, 2012)

In Fil a l'agulla we have used the Word Circles with different intentions, but given that our present work focuses on intervention in bullying, I will focus on the circles we do to raise awareness in this issue. The main intention in this case is to give a voice to the marginalized information of the group, to become aware of less known aspects and follow the process of the group. The following points describe more thoroughly the different goals:

- 1- Getting to know each other better and expanding the identity of the group: Word Circle offers the opportunity to reveal more marginalized and unknown aspects of the group, aspects that have to do with their secondary identity. For example, the expression of less visible and recognized emotions, personal experiences, less common or less socially permitted preferences or interests, sensations, dreams, family stories, etc.

When the group becomes aware of this information, it allows for an expansion of the identity of the group in the way in which it identifies itself.

It is a process that affects both people and relationships, as well as the group.

- 2- Embracing diversity: Word Circle also contributes to a change in the perspective of diversity and allows us to recognize how all the parties contribute to the functioning of the system. One of the challenges in the management of conflicts and relationships is to appreciate the "other" as something significant and valuable. Word Circle allows you to observe diversity and difference as part of the whole, and invites you to learn something from it. It helps cultivate an attitude that includes and recognizes the points of view of all its members.
- 3- Processing the conflict to approach the myth: behind each area of tension and conflict, behind each group and group identity there is a dream, a vision or myth trying to be lived, the conscience and the sense of which emerge when the group addresses and

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<sup>20</sup>Pranis, K. (2005). *The Little Book of Circle Processes. A new/Old Approach to Peacemaking*. Intercourse, PA.

processes their issues. The new consciousness often arises through annoyances, conflicts, relational problems and global issues. Being able to work with these tensions to explore them provides the means by which the dream process can emerge (Rose, 2009) Processing the conflict implies awareness of the damage and the people who feel it, and facilitate processes of taking responsibility, so that the people affected, whether victims, aggressors or witnesses, can propose processes of reparation of damage and restoration of relations.

- 4- Creating community: Mindell (2004) says that conflict is the most direct way to create community - when negotiating conflict relationships deepen and a sense of community is created.

Peck mentions that the essential key is to appreciate the differences and the ability to be able to see the suffering and the deep components of all involved. He says that the ability to be hurt by the wounds of others creates a feeling of sharing and community. (Rose, 2009).

The understanding that something is shared creates communion. People share what happens to them, they do not feel so alone when they see that other people can understand their experiences or share them. This breaks isolation, alienation and negative self-judgment (Rose, 2009). Through the Word Circle, they can feel the support of the group.

- 5- Developing social, relational and personal skills: talking about personal experience, sharing emotions, sensations, experiences, thoughts and beliefs nurtures empathy, listening, connection with power and other important life skills. Being able to share emotions and feelings forges the relationships in the group.

### **3.3.2. How does it work**

The Word Circles have the following basic elements:

- The circle: the whole group, including the facilitators and teachers (if they want to participate) sit on chairs in a circle. Sitting in a circle, everyone can have visual contact with each other, helping to build a sense of trust, security and equality within the group.
- The center: usually empty of objects. You can put some aesthetic object or a representation of something that the group values.
- A talking piece: something that's used to signal who's turn it is to express themselves in words or in silence. Depending on the group and the intention this could be an object of the group, of a participant or of the person who facilitates. You can have

objects. Often the Word Circle is presented explaining the importance of the object, this creates a climate that encourages expression on dreamland.

- The question: a question or a proposal gives focus intention to the circle.
- One or two people facilitate: they present the circle, its purpose and how it works. They intervene during the process facilitating the dialogue between the people and the roles that are present. Sometimes they also intervene expressing more difficult roles, ghost roles, present in the dynamics but that nobody is expressing.

These elements are the pack that facilitate expression and listening to ideas, positions, feelings and emotions.

The dynamic is posed as a ceremony, as a ritual. This helps to create a certain atmosphere in the group that encourages people to connect and communicate on more personal and emotional levels, as well as the more marginalized aspects of the group being able to express themselves.

Participation is voluntary and each person decides whether they want to speak or not.

### **3.3.3. Principles**

Any methodology and way of working is based on beliefs that define the principles that orientate the action. In our case these are mainly based on the perspective of Process Work and we could summarize them in the following way:

- Deep Democracy: a basic principle that is based on recognizing and giving value to the expression of all parties, experiences and roles. The most difficult aspects to recognize are those that are marginalized in the group, those which we don't identify with, for example the expression of emotions such as sadness, anger, frustration or experiences such as loneliness, not having friends, or behaviors like hurting with insults, leaving people out, etc. These are more difficult to recognize because there is a belief system that goes against them, and this is why it is important to be aware of these beliefs and be able to transform them, when necessary, with a view that includes and values diversity. The principle of deep democracy is based on the idea that in all experiences there may be something useful that can help in the development of the person, relationship and group.
- Systemic view: the group is composed of people and their personal experiences, relationships, affinity subgroups and also by roles. This view allows us to recognize that the experiences in the group are not only personal, they also have a systemic

dimension that has to do with the group itself. Therefore, it is not necessary for all people to express themselves, but we try to express the roles.

- Changing the positioning of the role of the teacher: in Word Circle, everyone talks about their own personal experiences and this temporarily changes the dynamics of power in the sense that the person-person dimension has more weight than the student-teacher dimension. The teacher becomes another person in the group who has her own experiences and emotions and is invited to share on a personal level and speak from that place.
- Restorative approach: this involves a new perspective to focus the resolution of a conflict based on the foundations of restorative justice:
  - Not only the person in the role of victim is affected, all people can be affected in different ways. It is about knowing which people have been affected and in what way.
  - Knowing the damage, knowing what is the most difficult for each person and what their needs are.
  - The shared responsibility in decision making. It is the people themselves who put forward proposals for the restoration and repair of the damage and the relationship, and they commit themselves to it. Proposals come from harm done and needs.

### **3.3.4. The role of facilitation**

Facilitation has several functions:

- Introduce the Word Circle and how it works.
- Focus it from a question, acknowledging the contributions that arise and refocusing when necessary.
- Guiding with your behavior, attitude and way of expressing yourself. Often, we begin by answering the questions we've just put to the group.
- Facilitate the expression of the different points of view and the dialogue between them.

We are usually two people facilitating. This enables us to represent and support the diversity of roles and experiences and support each other, to go to the essence of the role we are expressing.

Facilitating from this perspective implies a change of approach for the group, the relationships and for oneself. As we have said before we are part of the system, we affect it and it affects



us, so it is essential to do personal work, get to know oneself, realize how the issue affects you, what experiences, attitudes or behaviors are more difficult for you, etc. This helps to have more awareness and gain perspective, to be able to realize when we are reacting, when we are polarized in a role, when we feel an emotion, etc. and be able to use that information in a way that can be useful for the group process.

Mindell (1995) realized that the central ingredient of facilitation is the skills and attitudes with which we work and she called these metaskills. The term "meta" implies an external point of view from which we are able to observe what we are experiencing, what feelings occur at each moment and to be able to use these feelings and attitudes for the service of the group process. The focus is on its conscious use, it is a heartfelt attitude that connects us with our intentions, dreams and deep motivations.

Some of the key metaskills for facilitating the Word Circle are:

- Curiosity: it is key to be able to express the diversity of experiences, especially those most marginalized. Being curious implies having an interest in the known and the unknown, is an appreciative focus that facilitates the expression of diversity.
- Compassion: this is related to the principle of deep democracy and has to do with the openness to different experiences, knowing that they are aspects of ourselves. Mindell (1995) also points out that compassion involves helping all parties open out and reveal their essential nature and meaning.
- The art of being inside and outside: to feel as being part and have enough perspective to be able to realize where you are and therefore facilitate and accompany other positions and roles. It is the metaskill that helps us to be present in difficult situations, feeling the heat without being burned. And it also helps to be able to share your own emotion and experience with the certainty that it can be useful for the group process.

### **3.4. Word Circles and bullying**

Having presented the origin of the Word Circles and how they work, in this section I focus on relating the theory of bullying explained from Process Work and the use of the Word Circle as a tool to work on relationships in the classroom and the prevention of and attention to bullying.

Most of the examples cited correspond to activities carried out during the school year 2017-2018 and mainly at School "M". This has been a project that we have co-facilitated with Sara Carro, partner of Fil a l'agulla and colleague, for this reason her name is quoted in more than one case in the examples described. The voice recordings of the workshops have been very

useful to be able to review the interventions made and thus be more thorough in the descriptions.<sup>21</sup>

#### **3.4.1. The group and its process in the Word Circle**

The Word Circle is the opportunity to relate to the culture and identity of the group. To be able to appreciate the primary identity, to challenge it and focus on more marginalized and unknown aspects. One way we do this is by bringing our experience to the group, appreciating some aspect that we like, and naming something we did not like. Or, with questions to the group such as "*Name something that you like or makes you feel good about this group and something that does not.*"

When the secondary process of the group is present, attention increases and everyone becomes more present with what is happening in that moment. Often, previously, we can notice signs of edge - laughter, comments, people who move restlessly in their chairs.

#### **3.4.2. The Word Circle as a tool to identify the dynamics of discrimination, violence and bullying**

In the second chapter I said that a challenge in the educational community is to make this kind of dynamic visible. The Word Circle is a tool that allows us to break boundaries in talking about difficult things and expressing these type of situations. To facilitate this, we usually do previous activities that introduce the issue indirectly, through stories, dilemmas or dramatic pretexts. Once the subject is present we do the circle, opening it in a personal way. Sometimes as facilitators we offer our own personal experiences, and sometimes we talk about what we feel or have felt in the group and this helps other people share their own experiences.

In a Barberà secondary school, in a group of teenagers with special educational needs of 3rd of ESO (14-15 years old), we did a couple of sessions to work on situations of discrimination in the class and work on empathy. The second day the theme focused on exclusion and after some previous dynamics to reflect on power in the group and the strength of the group as opposed to the feeling of being marginalized or separated, we made a Word Circle. I started, and told my own story of my childhood, verging on tears, then my partner from Fil a l'agulla followed, telling her story, in her case in the role of aggressor, of when she tried to apologize to a friend that she had picked on for a long time, and who did not accept her apology any

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<sup>21</sup>Inòpia has been recording all the interventions in workshops and training sessions with the teachers of School

more. Later other people shared their experiences as victims and / or as aggressors, in past and present situations, expressing their suffering in both positions.

### **3.4.3. The relationship with the 3 levels of reality**

In point 2.2. I mentioned the importance of being able to value dreamland and more subjective experiences, since consensus reality is often used to measure reality, marginalizing other experiences. The Word Circle is an invitation to express oneself with emotions and experiences that are more personal, to bring the subjective world more into play and to be able to give it value.

In addition, the ritual element and the Word Circle help us to connect with other types of experiences such as the opportunity to live as a group at the essence level and have the feeling that we are one with the group.

Continuing with the previous example, in the second workshop we asked how it had gone and if they had noticed any change or what they had got from the previous day. They said that it had been useful to create a feeling of unity in the group, but that then on a day to day level everything went back to normal. During the Word Circle, on the first day, a very potent space for sharing and listening was generated, where most people talked at a personal level about how they felt in the group and many of them thanked each other for the support they received. It was very emotional, several boys and girls were crying, and there was full attention. They experimented the essence level as a group, and then in their day to day experience again from the consensus reality. On the second day, they were eager to relive that experience of union, but at the same time there was restraint to reopening on a personal level, to reconnect with the vulnerability and to cry. We reminded them about their freedom to speak or not, the importance of taking care of each other and we made a new Word Circle. On this occasion, fewer people spoke and it was also emotional and restorative.

### **3.4.4. Kids also cry: the expression of emotions**

During the 2017-2018 school year, we received a couple of criticisms from two families from two different schools, who said something like "*we make children cry, after the workshop they are sad and this can not be a positive result*". This has helped me to realize the principal aspect of this issue, that what we do is counter-cultural, since in the majority culture crying is seen as the expression of a negative emotion which must be suppressed, thus highlighting the

importance of sharing our stance and way of working with the entire educational community, including families.

Based on the principle of deep democracy, all emotions are valuable, and express different human experiences that are and have the potential to be useful for the development of people, relationships and groups. Crying may be expressing sadness, pain, suffering, shock, emotion and may even be a way of expressing empathy.

In a workshop in the 5th grade (10-11 years old) of M. school in a Word Circle we encouraged the group to shed light on and be more aware of the discrimination dynamic a girl was having, echoing what she expressed and giving voice to the role she expressed. After that there was a change of atmosphere and some people started crying. Some of them spoke, and others chose not to. I remember a child who said he was very sorry for what he had heard and that he also felt lonely at times. After that workshop, some people left the class still affected, and it is true that we didn't accompany the families in finding their children in that state. The criticism helped us to gain awareness of the impact of what we do, to take more account of the relationship with the group's tutor and families. After this we wrote a letter to inform the families of the school about the project and we talked with the tutors both to follow up and see how the children were doing, and to share what we'd learnt with those that had expressed the criticism.

In any case I don't think that expressing sadness causes children to dwell on it, as Menken (2013) also says, children are more fluid in their feelings than adults. And crying is only the expression of an emotion, and what makes them feel sad is not the crying but what causes that crying, and it won't be transformed by trying to make it disappear, but being aware of it, of that attitude and behavior that hurts. That was a Friday, and the following week, when we had to go back to do a workshop in the group, some people came with personal items like stuffed animals, to feel more comfortable in the space of the Word Circle. They had "prepared" themselves for the occasion, perhaps even one of them would name the workshop as the space to cry. In the presentation the teacher, aware of the criticism that one of the families of that group had made, asked us if we *"had come to the class to make them cry"*. We returned the question to the group and two children responded. One said *"No, it was to address issues of discrimination."* And the other said that *"We were going to talk about relationships to know how others are feeling, and that sometimes there are people who get emotional, especially because you put yourself in the skin of the other person."*

It is common that when there have been several people crying in a workshop, when we return, even though a year has passed, it is one of the things that they remember the most, and some people even prepare for it. It is interesting, as children come willingly to that, as if there is something attractive and interesting about it, while some adults look at it with

### 3.4.5. The expression of emotions in the Word Circle

Working in the Word Circle allows the expression of different emotions. Normally there are certain emotions more marginalized in groups, such as the expression of anger and rage, sadness, pain, emotional crying, frustration, etc. In those moments, we usually stop to pay attention to what is happening, because there are usually signs of boundaries on the part of the person and the group, and framing them helps to facilitate their expression and welcome them.

A teacher of third grade (8-9 years old children) from M. school, upon entering the class, greeted each person one by one with their special greeting, which each one had chosen. She worked a lot on relationships in the classroom, and individualized work with each person. This group was quite cohesive and there was a very good relationship with the teacher. We started the Word Circle, inviting several people to bring their important personal objects to do the ritual. When it was the teacher's turn, a student asked *"Are you crying?"* and she replied *"No, sweetheart"*, and another commented to the group *"She's red with emotion"*. Several people were moving restlessly in their chairs, an edge signal, the teacher was not used to getting emotional and revealing herself to the group – it was secondary for her and for the group - and she denied her experience because it was difficult for her to have the attention of the group at that moment. In that case, we intervened, supporting emotional expression, and saying *"If someone turns red or gets emotional it's okay, it's good for them to express themselves, and it helps if we don't make comments"* and we invited the group to reflect on this - *"When we create a space for emotions, can we think about what helps people to feel safe with what they are feeling?"* The Word Circle began with the question *"How do you feel in this group?"* and several children spoke appreciating the people who supported them in difficult times, valuing classmates and their abilities and especially valuing her teacher. When her turn came, she was very emotional and passed on the object without wanting to talk, and we intervened by pausing that moment to make sure if she wanted to put words to what she was feeling. A student came over to hug her, she did not want to talk, and the Circle continued. The group was restless and several people got up to go to the bathroom. Sara asked *"what's going on?"*, to which a girl said, *"I don't want to see anyone else crying anymore, because if I see someone else I ..."*. In the end, the teacher spoke and expressed what was going on for her. She said that it had been a tense and difficult week for her, and that listening to beautiful things they said made her very touched, and that she was happy and deeply grateful. Her fear or difficulty was that they cared about her. This was the limiting belief. Our way of facilitating the situation was to frame what was happening, welcoming the expression of the secondary process, without forcing it, so that the teacher felt free to express or not, what she was feeling. In fact, it was not until the second round that she explained how she felt.

Crying in that group was marginalized and part of the secondary process, whether this meant expressing a happy or sad emotion. With that experience, they learned that crying can express many different emotions. However, in this example you can see the process of the group as a continuum, at the moment in which the teacher jumped the edge to be able to express the crying connected with emotion and joy, another person from the group jumped the edge to express her sadness in the group, something even more secondary. Although she did not share her experience, because of conversations with the teacher, we knew that she was expressing something that was happening to her and was hurting her. It was quite an experience, to be able to finish the workshop with some people crying and showing support amongst themselves. The workshop ended with hugs and expressions of affection. As Diamond (2016) says, it is important to embrace low rank and vulnerability. Learning this helps emotional and social development and empathy, and facilitates empowerment and connection with personal power.

#### **3.4.6. The role shift of the teacher and the adult**

In the Word Circle, roles and power dynamics change, and this can be an opportunity for teachers to open up on a personal level and express themselves as one of the group, momentarily letting go of their contextual role as teachers and allowing students to be moved with their most personal stories and show support, as seen in the previous example. This also facilitates the change of the role of students who go from being in the role of who needs, to be who supports.

The role of teacher has associated the contextual rank. Being the one who holds that kind of power, what the teacher shows is a model for the group and becomes a reference to follow. That the teacher shows her personal life, her vulnerability and her emotions, teaches that adults also feel that way sometimes. It is a way to embrace the low rank of those experiences that make us feel vulnerable and needy, a way to cultivate personal power.

Also, from a role perspective, it is interesting to cultivate fluidity and see that all people are more than a role. Therefore, the role of being the one who needs support can not only be occupied by children, but also adults and teachers sometimes feel that way, momentarily occupying this role, without necessarily losing their contextual role as teachers. This means a change in the belief system of what it means to be a teacher. Often we as facilitators also model, showing our own vulnerability and sensitivity, crying in the group with our own experiences and theirs.

#### 4.7. Multilevel intervention

The work with the Word Circle is a type of multilevel intervention, which allows working with people, relationships in the group and also at the group level.

1. **Individual:** sometimes we intervene with people to bring more awareness to whether they want to speak or not, or also to reinforce their attitudes, actions, tastes, ways of being or aspects that are marginalized and criticized by the group. We also intervene at this level on occasions to compensate for the introjection of the guilt that happens in a process of long-term victimization to make them aware that they are not guilty of what happens to them, to ask for their forgiveness and value who they are. In a group of 6th (11-12 years) in the M. school after an activity where we talked about exclusion, we made a Word Circle so that they could share their experiences on the subject, in one of the three roles. One girl spoke and said that sometimes she felt excluded from groups of girls because she did not like to talk so much, but rather liked to play football and draw. Although they didn't tell her explicitly that she could not be with them, that is, there was no exclusion at the level of consensus reality, her subjective experience, in dreamland, was different. She was a racialized<sup>22</sup> girl with different interests than the rest of the girls in the class. For this reason, it was especially important to give space and reiterate what happened next. One boy said that she was a very good goalkeeper and another girl agreed with him, saying that she was also active and that they played moving a lot, something that she was criticizing herself. This encouraged her and made her feel better.
2. **Relationships:** at other times, there are people in the Word Circle who address another person, in this case, with their permission, we facilitate a dialogue. In a class of 2nd grade in M. school there was a 7 years old boy who was having difficulties in the group. He wanted to play with the other children and especially with one of them who was more of a leader, but this boy continually bullied him and used opportunities to point out the things he did wrong. In the workshop, this happened and we took advantage of the situation to voice the underlying situation, showing the anger on the part of the marginalized child who always received the criticism and supporting the child who was more of a leader, so that he would be more aware of the impact of his act. Sara and I played out their roles, voicing what was happening, verifying with them, and they nodded if we did it right. In the interaction, Sara named the anger of feeling singled out by the other boy, and the desire to play with him and I named, from the side of the leader child, the difficulty of being sad and feeling bad and that an easy

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<sup>22</sup> We speak of a "racialized" person as someone who is seen and perceived contextually as belonging to a minority race with less social rank. And race is understood as a historical social construct. Therefore, it is a

way of dealing with it was to do muck around. Neither of them spoke, they just looked at us, between them, and nodded. And while the attention was on something else, the leader child took a newspaper to the other, sharing a joke with him, and that was a significant sign of reaching out, which marked a change in his mood. It was his peculiar and unique way of asking for forgiveness and getting closer, in the moment.

3. **Group:** other times it is expressed at a more group level, or rather, we take the dynamics to that level to be able to give depth to the subject that is being treated. In a group of 5<sup>º</sup> (10-11 year olds) in M. school, we made a Word Circle to find out about their play dynamics in the playground and a boy asked a group of girls why they told him to leave them alone when he wanted play with them. In this case, the interaction began at the relational level, and we facilitated the dialogue between the three girls and the boy, but since it was not getting much deeper, we invited other people from the group to participate, asking them if any similar situation had happened to them. Another girl told the boy that she told him to go away because sometimes he upset them and then the game ended badly. He recognized a little that that sometimes happened, and that he had once called them names. The underlying theme had to do with the affinity subgroups, if they could choose who they wanted to be with and the tendency or not to play with the same people. Since the subject was on a role we decided to refocus it and ask how they felt in relation to the class groups. The first person to respond said that he would like it to be like when they were younger and they all played together. The different interventions showed that there was a desire to play more with the whole class, and that the difficulty of dealing with the problems that arose made them choose the affinity subgroups, where they understood each other better. In the end, they came up with the proposal that one day the whole class would play a game together and then evaluate with the tutor how the experience had been.

#### **3.4.8. Working with the role of the aggressor**

The role of the aggressor is a more secondary role, in the sense that it is more difficult to identify with it, to do harm is looked down on, so much that it makes it difficult to admit it. When you realize it, you feel deep shame, and it is easier to run away than to face it. In a workshop in 3rd (14-15 years) of the ESO, in Barberà del Vallès, an example that I mentioned earlier, there was a girl crying remembering moments where she had been an aggressor. I was thinking about situations in that class, and although we invited her to say something more concrete at the time, she was unable to do so. It was too much, at that moment, to push that



In another workshop with a 5th grade group (10-11 years) from the same town, they called us to intervene in a bullying dynamic. There was a child who was receiving psychological monitoring and who stated that he felt very bad at school. The head teacher and the tutor were putting a lot of focus on the situation. The tutor said that she did not observe these dynamics of exclusion when she was present and didn't really know what to do. In the second workshop with this group, in a dynamic about bullying we identified the different roles and the person in the role of victim spoke and said that it helped him to feel better when he felt the support of his friends. The corner where we put the role of the aggressor was empty until a child went there, and with tears in his eyes said that when he behaved like that he felt strong and important and felt bad for that. As we were already talking about personal experiences, we went to the Word Circle and the question was "*How do you feel, what helps you to feel better and is there something you could do to make the people in this class feel better?*". The person who felt victimized started talking about his experience and sitting next to him were the boys of that class who were more in the position of aggressor or witness. They started talking one after the other, crying and apologizing for leaving him out, when they had been friends before, for having made disparaging comments, for throwing his personal belongings ... It was very emotional, then other people shared their own experiences as victims or "baddies", as one girl said, and they recognized the damage done to other people in the group. In this case, the boundary was pushed precisely by one of the people in the role of aggressor, who with his sensitivity was able to overcome the shame and talk about it. He expressed fear of suffering as a victim when he went to ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education).

#### **3.4.9. Working on empathy and the role of the witness**

In a workshop of 5<sup>º</sup> (10-11 years) in M School, we made a Word Circle and in the first round they expressed how they felt in the group. The majority said that it was good, and they related it to having friends and making affinity groups, but one person said that she felt sad because she did not have many friends. When it was my turn I was emotional, I felt sad and I shared how I felt and how it reminded me of my own experience in school.

We decided to do a second round, where we would put emphasis on the role of the witness, inviting them to say what they felt when they heard the different experiences in the class. The question was "*How is it for you to listen to these different experiences in class, to have or not to have friends, and with this in mind how do you feel, how do you see it and what do you think you can do?*". In that round, there was more than one person who cried, so then we stopped talking for a while and several others approached them and hugged them and

showed their support. When he could speak, one of them said sobbing that he was very sorry to see that there was someone in the class who had no friends. At the end of the circle, Sara gave voice to the role of the victim and said *"We're going to stop doing this and I don't think I'm going to have relationships that make me feel good but to see that this affects others helps me ..., but also I would like different things to happen, although I know it's not easy. "*

Understanding that anyone can assume any of the roles supports the development of compassion towards others, and that's what happened in that workshop. The challenge in such cases is to continue working with the group so that they can also occupy an active role, and move from passive witness to people who act to change situations that affect them.

#### **3.4.10. Working with the role of the victim**

Following the previous case, Sara told the person who had expressed not having friends *"The fact that you don't have friends now, it's not your fault and it has nothing to do with things you've done in the past ... It's not your fault"*. It is common that when someone is in this situation, they feel guilty and responsible for what is happening to them, without taking into account the social and group dimension, this is the introjection of the guilt that was discussed in chapter 2. For this reason, giving messages of this type is important to work the intrapsychic dimension and relate to that internal critic that affects the self-esteem of the person. In this workshop many people probably connected with their own loneliness in the group, feeling momentarily in the role of the victim, who is separated or excluded from the group. That moved them deeply.

Another important aspect is to relate to the other dimensions of that person, not only with his role as victim, but also to facilitate his own connection with power. In a Santa Coloma school, there was a child who they called gayboy because he danced and hung out with the girls in the yard, and the intervention in that case was *"Thank you very much for doing what you like to do. This is one of the most important things in life and this class have a lot to learn from people who do what they want to do"*<sup>23</sup> The child didn't say anything, he just nodded silently and the round of the Word Circle followed.

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<sup>23</sup>This intervention is recorded and archived in the video "Fil a l'agulla. Coeducation project in schools "of 2016.

### **3.4.11. Roles, power dynamics and role shift**

The dynamics of the Word Circle allows us to work at a systemic level, as we have seen in the previous examples, working the dynamics of bullying in the different roles. Based on what is manifested in each group, questions or interventions are chosen that help to put more awareness into what is becoming visible, allowing the roles to change momentarily. For example, when a person in the role of aggressor starts crying realizing the damage he has done, he changes role, moving through the role of witness that observes the damage he is doing to another person, to the role of victim that suffers from an internal critic who says "You have done wrong, you have hurt someone".

In addition, the Word Circle is a space that also allows the questioning of the group's belief system, which encourages certain attitudes or actions to be more valued than others, momentarily questioning the group's contextual power. The previous mention of the Santa Coloma school is an example of how this is done.

### **3.4.12. Relationship with the Group Process methodology**

Both the Word Circle and the Group Process are methodologies that serve to discuss issues of interest to the group, in which there is a diversity of opinions and experiences. A Group Process is a Process Work methodology that is characterized by starting to work on the topic at a systemic level, presenting two polarized roles in space, one in front of the other. People are placed in space, in one of the two positions or around, according to whether they want to express something from a role or feel and notice one position or another and can move freely through space whenever they want. In both cases, there are people who facilitate, framing what happens, representing a role or facilitating dialogue and interaction.

One of the main differences between both methodologies is that in the Word Circle there is a word order, everyone is in a circle, and they can only speak if they have the "word object". On the other hand, in a Group Process, whoever speaks occupies a position in the space, without an established order or turns for talking.

In 4th grade group of the M school in the presentation of the workshop, a 9 years-old girl brought up the subject of the use of space in the yard, commenting that 80% of the yard was used only by 20% of people, those that played football. When she said this, the others responded with reactions and comments. It was a crucial moment in the group where the tension between two poles - those who defended football and those who did not, was identified and several people started talking at the same time, interrupting each other, accusing each other and becoming more angry. At this point we stopped and said that it

seemed important to have a space to continue talking about it, for the chance to listen and to find out how everyone felt about it so that everyone would be more aware, so we took up the topic in the Word Circle.

Below I describe the postures that came up on the subject, collected in a literal and sequential order in the Word Circle:

- *"Some children think a lot about what they like and I would like them to also think about how others feel. I want them to also think about people who do not like football "*
- *"Because the football kids occupy the whole yard and when someone gets hit\* they say Go away then..." (\*with the ball)*
- *"I don't care if they complain. Everyone likes something. For example, I like football. And you can't complain about people because if I hit someone, I apologize. That is, you can not complain about all the people. I am not the type to run away if I hit someone. I'm angry that they complain because they have a playground down the bottom that they don't use "*

This provoked someone who responded that the bottom playground was for the little kids. We framed what was happening then asked the boy if he wanted to say anything else because there were signs of emotion in his eyes. He was still angry and what he said was again an accusation, which escalated the other side. So, we continued with the Word Circle.

- *"It only happens occasionally, but sometimes they get in the way, they distract us, we can't score goals ... And they tell us that we should occupy less, when they have already taken away three days of football ... Let us play with the two days we have "*
- *"Football needs a specific space. It's logical because a football field is big. There is another space in the playground to play fronton (Spanish game)"*
- *"It's true, we occupy 80% of the playground and I don't say it's wrong, but we need space for our game. It would be fair, if they had more space but taking away our football days is not so fair"*
- *"I like football, and I'm on the side of the girls too in that we occupy almost the entire playground, and I find it unfair that we only have 3 days of football"*

With these last interventions we began to see a change in the way of intervening, there was more capacity to see the other side, more empathy. When it was my turn I pointed out that when people recognized that they occupied space this helped the other side and I also acknowledged and valued that there are people in the group for whom it is very important to play football.

- *"... there have been people who have recognized that they occupy much more of the playground, and this helps me to see that I am not the only one who thinks this ..."*

*don't agree that they take away all the football ... and I would like to come to an agreement so that those who don't want football and those who want it can get on"*

This intervention embraced both positions from a place of leadership, facilitating a temporary resolution with that topic.

Then there were other interventions that repeated comments and we also began to ask what other things they played and what they could do the days that they couldn't play football, which they liked, as then the theme of football did not continue to occupy so much space.

There were some more interventions then we closed the Word Circle by thanking everyone for what had just happened, since it is not usual to have conversations with as much listening and recognition as we'd just experienced.

This example shows how a Group Process happened in a Word Circle, where the different positions, the discomfort, the value and the importance of playing football and other games were identified and expressed, and in which both positions could be recognized, facilitating listening and a deeper understanding of the situation. Our interventions and what took place were similar to those that would be made in a Group Process.

The difference is therefore in the way of participating and in the use of space to locate the different positions, as is usually done in a Group Process, making it easier to be mindful of the systemic view of the topic in the form of roles, and also to realize more easily when you are changing roles.

Overall, taking into account the ages of the participants, I think the use of the circle is very appropriate, since the word object, the ritual and the structure of the Word Circle confers some limits that are very important in the development of children. Wild (2012), in his book "Freedom and Limits: Love and Respect" says that limits can have the function of defining a space in which you can act with independence and freedom and provide security, and only in an environment where the concepts of freedom and limits are lived with coherence will a harmonious coexistence be possible.

### **3.4.13. From the solution to the temporal resolution in the Word Circles. The restorative approach**

Mindell (2017) says that solutions are crucial, but often they are not sustainable without everyone learning to relate better between themselves and with the issue involved. In the case of bullying it's crucial to work on the dynamics of exclusion when they occur in order to have the experience of how we relate to each other and how to manage the situation, and this is the tool that will come for future occasions

In addition, from the restorative perspective, it is fundamental to understand that what each person needs to solve the situation is particular and unique, and often this isn't clear from an external position. For this reason, it is very important that the people involved participate in the management of the conflict or situation of exclusion and in the proposal of solutions to it.

In a workshop with a group of 3<sup>o</sup> of Primary (between 8 and 9 years old) in a school in Barberà del Vallès, when we made the circle with the chairs, a child put a chair between him and the child who was at his side. We asked him why he was doing it and he said he didn't want to sit next to him. It was a very participatory and restless group where it was difficult to get them to be quiet and to listen to each other, and some people had a tendency to comment on what other people said. So, then we stopped the activity to focus on that situation and the whole group stopped moving and talking. Since we were working on the dynamics of exclusion we took advantage of the situation to go deeper into it. We were trying different interventions - we tried to find out if something had happened previously, to vocalize their experiences, to ask the group how they felt and if they had proposals, to identify the emotions, etc. Then unexpectedly, the child who had been separated proposed to the other that they solve it between themselves outside the class. They went out for a while and when they came back they sat together and when we asked them how they were doing, they said fine.

This example illustrates the importance of the process, the relationships and the conflict management itself. If at first, we had proposed a solution, such as letting the child choose another place to sit so that both people could be ok, we would have missed the opportunity to learn more about that experience. It was an opportunity for the group to work on empathy and strengthen the links and support among them. Several children participated positively, supporting the affected boy, and also supporting the boy who was momentarily being the aggressor to be aware of it and the impact of his action. In addition, it was the aggrieved person himself who proposed a way to manage the situation that facilitated a favorable temporary resolution for them both, momentarily changing the power dynamic. It was a process of empowerment for him, in which he could connect with his own power to facilitate the resolution of the conflict in a way that did not make the other person feel bad.

#### **3.4.14. Closing the Word Circles and the continuation of the process**

The Word Circle ends when the talking object returns to the person who initiated it, that is, to the facilitator. Sometimes, if there is time, there is more than one round with the same or other questions, or the talking object is passed directly to people who still have more things

The Word Circle facilitates the awareness of the group around the dynamics of the relationships between them. Sometimes that awareness allows visible changes and sometimes not. That is why the work that their own teachers and role models do on a daily basis is crucial.

In the cases in which we returned to work with the same group, if in the first workshop there were people who had been doing or saying things that the others didn't like we usually asked if they continued with this behavior or had stopped doing it. This is a way to record and identify the changes, as sometimes it seems that things don't change, although not that they haven't changed, but that we haven't observed the difference. This has to do with expectations, often what is expected is that the situation of discrimination stops completely and this does not allow to make visible other changes in attitude, frequency and intensity of this violent behavior... This work is important to do with the children, but above all with the teachers and referents of the group, since these are the ones who will be there doing the follow-up continuously. For this reason, we often dedicate time to meetings with teachers to support this monitoring and gain awareness of expectations, in order to adjust them and make visible what is different.

In any case, to focus on the success of the Word Circles only on behavioral changes would be to focus only on the supposed solution, when, as we have said before, something key that also happens through the circle is the experience of working through conflicts in relationship and in group, and acquiring tools and skills for future conflicts and situations of discrimination. This is harder to measure.

## **4. The experience at school “M”**

### **4.1. The project at school “M”**

At the M. school, in Barcelona, in the 2017-18 school year, Fil a l'agulla proposed a comprehensive diversity attention project that focused on teacher training to include the restorative view and to work with Word Circles to address the dynamics of discrimination and conflicts. The project was subsidized by the City Council of Barcelona and received the support of the faculty of the teachers, the management team and the Parents Association of the M. school.

In this school during the 2015-2016 academic year, an integral project was carried out where coeducation and the gender perspective were mainly worked on. As a result of the interventions in the classrooms a case of bullying was detected, a fact that stimulated more intervention with the students and a workshop with families. The current head of studies, in a meeting with a family, said that the intervention and support of Fil a l'agulla at that time was very important. The case was complex, there were threats of official complaints and the intervention of the previous headmaster of the school escalated the conflict. The Teaching Department as the responsible body intervened and in the 2016-17 academic year appointed a new head teacher in order to promote a change.

In the 2016-17 academic year, we intervened sporadically by holding workshops in groups that the school identified as needing more, and there were 2 sessions in 2 groups and a second workshop about bullying with families.

As in the school there had been a case of bullying and the management team was open to proposals of this type, we proposed to implement a comprehensive program of attention to the dynamics of discrimination, which would focus on the adoption of the tools and of the method, so that the project could continue without our presence.

Below I describe its main characteristics:

General goals of the project:

- Develop a focus on the people, relationships, groups and structures that accommodate diversity, and promote a constructive resolution of conflicts.
- Contribute to the outreach of families in the school and to the cohesion of the educational community.

Expected impact of the project at the M. school:

- To identify and generate awareness around the dynamics of discrimination



- Increase agency capacity and experimentation in relation to the management of diversity in schools
- Create and consolidate spaces for restorative practice at school
- Contribute to the construction of a cohesive educational community around coeducation and diversity

#### Activities:

- Teacher training: focus on diversity, tools and skills for emotional accompaniment and conflict management and introduction to the Word Circles (7 sessions of 1h 30m). And a specialized counseling to teachers of children with less than 6 years old.
- Participatory action research (IAP) to open a space for participation around a topic of interest and promote a process of transformation with concrete actions. The core group is formed with families and teachers and the issue of discrimination is chosen around two central themes - gender and special educational needs. The decision is taken to link the IAP with the process, which will take place in the 2018-2019 academic year around a process of transformation of the playground. The actions that are decided are questionnaires to families about discrimination, questionnaires to the students about the use of the playground, observations in the playground to see patterns of grouping and children who are left out and a map of uses of the playground.
- Intervention in primary school classrooms (6 – 12 years old) with Word Circles (a session of 1h 30m with each course) as modeling and introduction to the methodology of the Word Circles for the tutor of each group.
- Extra intervention hours. Based on the identification of needs and in dialogue with the faculty and the management team, more interventions are defined in the classroom with groups where a specific conflictive situation has been detected or with advice to the teaching staff.
- Family-school dialogue space: a session with families and one with the families and teachers.
- Evaluation of the project based on these tools:
  - Questionnaires to the teaching staff to be done at the beginning and at the end. They incorporate questions of assessment and perception of the formation and of the other actions.
  - Surveys of student victimization, at the beginning and at the end, in order to record the changes in the relational dynamics in the groups.
  - Discussion groups with a token group of participants. The analysis of non-conscious discourse allows us to see the effects of the group process on

language (everything that is said without being aware of it, in addition to what is consciously stated).

- Systematic observation. There are aspects of the actions that are not captured by the questionnaires and the interviews. Aspects such as atmosphere, interactions or non-verbal elements which provide valuable information about any project action.
- Video of the experience that compiles the work with the Word Circles. The recording, editing and production is done by Inòpia.

The activities began in January 2018 and ended in June 2018, minus the evaluation and the video that ends in October 2018.

## **4.2. Development and evaluation of the project**

The final evaluation of the entire project will be done in October 2018, but given that the delivery of this project is prior to this date, in this chapter I explain the development and evaluation of the project with the data I have.

The teaching staff of the M. school are exceptional. It is a little school, with a small team of people, and although there are several new teachers, they have fitted in very well with the new pedagogical proposal and the management team. The change of direction includes a pedagogical change and working relationships and conflict management.

The school has a Parent Association (AFA), which they say is intensely active, there are many work commissions, although they would like to have more fathers and mothers participating. The training and concealing has been very well received by most of the faculty, some of them already knew us from previous issues, a fact that has facilitated the link and confidence. This has also been the case of AFA and students, with the exception of one family, who has sent us several notifications expressing their criticism regarding the methodology and our procedure in the project.

All these previous factors are key elements. The openness of the teachers and the management team has greatly facilitated the development of the project and the change of view around the dynamics of discrimination and work with conflicts.

In one of the last sessions with the faculty, on April 18th 2018, we made a Word Circle so that they could share their experiences in relation to the use of the Word Circle and the management of conflicts and the prevention of discrimination. These are some of the comments they made:

Teacher of the group of 1st grade (6-7 years), with which we did 2 workshops: *"In our class everything is done in a Circle, maybe they are not proper Word Circles, but ... There were few conflicts and I didn't deal with conflicts so much in a Circle, but today there was an incident with a girl who produces conflicts with the rest of the class and tells lies and I asked the question "What do the others feel like when we lie?" ... and everyone told her how they felt and very nice things came out of it. These are things that surprise me from first-graders, and thanks to this practice you value the maturity of many of them, how they vent their emotions and how they're conscious of it, and that perhaps wouldn't otherwise come out if we didn't make that time to talk "*

Teacher of the 2nd grade group (7-8 years), with which we did two workshops for the 2017-18 academic year, two in the previous course and a 1h counseling session: *"In the second term my group had many conflicts of coexistence, between girls and boys. We used restorative Circles a lot and they worked well. It was therapeutic because they allowed the expression of emotions, and now they have total confidence to ask for Circle session to deal with conflicts. The conflicts have been minimized to the point that the coexistence in the summer camps has been fantastic and right now I am not solving conflicts in the classroom ... These things are obviously not permanent, things change and I may have to use them later. Right now, I use the Circle more to find out how we are feeling, what things we liked about an activity, but not so much to solve issues... The coexistence has improved a lot. "*

Teacher class 4<sup>th</sup> grade (9-10 years old), with whom we did 2 workshops, but in that day we had only done the first: *"I don't know if I can say much. I feel different from everyone, from you. I don't do Word Circles because I don't know how to do it. And what little I have done has surprised me because I see that those of 4th year basically don't know how to express anything. Basically people who I'd thought were going to express something have been incapable and the people who act cool, I don't know how to force them to talk. What I've done is with the people involved with the issue. But it is a group that does not know how to express themselves. ... And I feel terrible, because I think they all need to talk ... I do not want to deal with a topic that neither suits them nor interests them, and in my class with many subjects this happens. And I do not know how to do it. I'm on my own in the classroom, I can't go out into the playground and if there is not someone else who is with me I can't do it. And sometimes when I want to intervene, I don't know how to do it without manipulating the Word Circle, because they are not saying what I think would come out, ... and also that the whole subject*

*goes with the person who spoke before and other issues have to come out, not just this one. "*

Teacher of 5<sup>th</sup> grade (10-11 years), with which we did two workshops and two more the previous course: *"I do not remember what idea I had the second day, but I do remember that I wanted to apply the Word Circles and every Monday for the first hour we did a Word Circle. The questions were very varied, from "what is it that they liked most about the school trip, or for those that didn't go, about the weekend, to, things that make you feel bad, things that have happened that we don't like, things that we can improve", and as a result of this and other dynamics that I have done in the class, the comments box is over, there is no paper, and that is positive, because it had become complaints, complaints, complaints and now they have disappeared. Also, I've noted very positively that the relationships between them have improved, they don't make such derogatory comments, at least not that I can hear... maybe among themselves they criticize each other, but not in front of me and we are on the right track "*

Teacher of 6th grade (11-12 years), until then we had only done one workshop with the group and a counseling session: *"In class 6th we are using the Word Circles, and at first the only conflict that always came up was the topic of football. But now we have got beyond that and we are also working on the understanding between them, how they form small groups, and now we are focusing on topics such as "how would you feel if they did not choose you, what would happen if you were left out, if we imagine that we can all be the leaders what would we do, etc ... "*

Other teachers commented on how they included the restorative view in conflict management. And they also commented on the interrelation between them and the different spaces in which they work, how information is passed and what they do when there are issues that can not be resolved in the classroom and children are sent to the head teacher.

There was only one teacher who didn't use the Word Circles. What I appreciated about her intervention was her sincerity, she felt the freedom to be able to express herself, although her opinion or experience was very different and this is one of the goals of our work. She didn't feel she had the tools and skills to implement it, however her contribution was very interesting since she raised key questions when intervening and carrying out a similar dynamic, and we used them to deepen a little more on the subject.

In the second session with families, on May 4th, 2018, in which two teachers and the head teacher were also present, with the question "What worries you?", I was struck by the fact that nobody mentioned discrimination, bullying or the relationships between the students. However, with the question "What do you like and appreciate about the school?", the functional and cultural diversity and the emotional work that was being carried out were positively assessed. The concerns revolved around other topics, such as the continuity of the educational project, due that part of the teaching staff of the center aren't permanent, or around the lack of participation of the free time educators in the school project.

Another key aspect in the development of this project has been the criticism we received from a family. They sent us a letter with several complaints and we invited them to a meeting with the head teachers and the Parents Association. (AFA). The process helped us to take into account more the role of families in the project, the importance of informing and transmitting more about the project as well as taking into account how the children come back to home after an emotional workshop. It also helped us to look at the legal aspects of data protection and permits, as well as having a clearer positioning of how we work and what our basic principles are. At the meeting, we invited the family to participate in the reunions we organized for this and they did so, however the criticism continued and ended up with a complaint to the City Council. Both the school and the AFA showed their disagreement with their way of acting and their comments, and have supported the project throughout.

With the indicators that exist so far you can see how the relationships in the classroom have changed between the students, and the teachers' view of addressing diversity and situations of discrimination and bullying, and some teachers have incorporated the use of the Word Circle in their daily practice.

## 5. Final conclusions

Carrying out this project has allowed me to understand in more depth the dynamics of bullying. Process Work and several of its basic concepts and principles allow us to understand more fully the complexity of experiences that occur in this field.

Next, I summarize the main ideas:

- Even if the criteria to identify a situation of bullying at the level of consensus reality are not met, at the level of dreamland the person's subjective experience may be of feeling victimized. This is part of reality and must be taken into account.
- For some teachers, head teachers and families it is very difficult to recognize bullying. In such cases, knowing more about the experience of these people, what they say is not happening and what their fears are, will retrospectively help them to relate to the experience of discrimination. A challenge in the intervention is to work with the negative beliefs towards this behavior, to reduce the extreme view that makes it difficult for the person implicated to recognize it and also for the educational community in general.
- Although there might not be bullying, there are dynamics of discrimination in schools and it is very important to address them.
- In bullying there are three roles involved: the aggressor, the victim and the witnesses. Everyone has the capacity to occupy any of the roles. Understanding this helps develop compassion. When a person stops occupying the role, if the dynamics have not been fully processed and the relationships worked on, nor the message and the useful essence of the role recognized, the role can be filled by another person, and the dynamics of bullying continue.
- When you do not identify with power, and, in addition, you have felt a victim of abuse in other situations, you can potentially occupy the role of aggressor.
- The victim internalizes the aggression by internalizing the role of the aggressor through the internal critic. So then they have two aggressors, the external and the internal. Although the external aggressor stops, it is very important to attend to the internal dynamics, to counteract the feeling of guilt, negative self-construction and judgments. Working with the internal dynamics of aggression and criticism is also important for the other roles.
- To appreciate and welcome vulnerability and the expression of emotions such as sadness, frustration, shame, pain, etc., will help the victim to not isolate himself and to be able to express what is happening to him. Being able to move between roles

with power and without power helps develop emotional and social skills such as compassion towards others.

- Without the role of the witness, the dynamics of bullying would not exist.
- The role of facilitation or eldership is the key to stop the dynamics of violence, from an understanding of the dynamics and roles that allows us to attend to what is happening and at the same time look after the people and relationships.
- Some violent behavior of a verbal or social nature such as insults or neglecting a person, are more normalized than others. It is necessary to identify them and acknowledge them. Beyond repressing and punishing, it is important to be able to recognize what is the underlying message of that behavior that is important for the process of the person and the group. Being able to talk about it freely relieves the system and reduces the need to act with violence.
- The dynamics of bullying is systemic and affects the whole group. It is useful to be able to process and work on it with that in mind. In order to achieve sustainable change it is useful for the transformation to occur at a personal, relational and group level and therefore to propose interventions at all levels and with all the educational community members.
- To intervene and work with situations of bullying it is important to do personal work and know what principles influence your way of acting.

The other field of the project is intervention in situations of bullying with two basic contributions: the restorative vision and the Word Circles.

Including the restorative approach in the treatment of bullying and conflicts in general provides guidelines and a process that looks after both the relationships and the people involved, and puts a limit on violent behavior. It helps the process of taking responsibility with the people affected proposing the solutions, facilitating their relationship with power.

Taking this approach into account has given me a clearer direction when it comes to accompanying this type of situation and to facilitate simple and easily replicated intervention guidelines for the educational community. The idea that each person suffers in different ways is very important, therefore there can't be universal solutions, so it is important to find out what each person needs to feel better. In addition this approach facilitates the development of social and emotional skills.

The challenge in conflict management and intervention in bullying is how to follow this approach without forcing a concrete resolution when it's not appropriate, facilitating the connection with power and respecting the group process.

Finally, reflecting on the use of Word Circles has helped me enormously to realize everything that we do with the interventions in situations of discrimination and bullying and has allowed me to elaborate the tool in order to get more out of it. As the experience of the M school shows the Word Circles are a very useful, duplicable tool that facilitate the work of conflict management and classroom relations.

This work has fed my interest in the field of conflict management in the school environment. I have not found much literature that looks into the subject from a perspective similar to the one I have presented, and I consider the opportunity in the future to continue learning and sharing more of what I learn in this field.



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