



Revista de Psicodidáctica

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Original

The Role of Teaching Practices in the Prevention of School Violence among Peers[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 June 2016

Accepted 16 February 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Teaching practices

School climate

Empathy

School violence

ABSTRACT

This study includes an analysis of the relationships between peer violence, teaching practices, school environment, and empathy. The sample includes 385 adolescents (219 males and 166 females), with a mean age of 12.94 ($SD=1.77$), and one of their parents (mean age = 42.21, $SD=8.98$) from 17 Mexican secondary schools. A structural equation model was constructed using AMOS software. The study results indicate that a non-permissive teaching system and parental practices aimed at preventing violence have a direct relationship with reduced peer violence. Moreover, both teaching practices are related indirectly to peer violence, through its effect on school environment and empathy. From the present study, it is concluded that these practices prevent peer violence, improve the school environment, and foster empathy. Finally, the results, as well as their possible implications, are discussed.

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El rol de las prácticas docentes en la prevención de la violencia escolar entre pares

RESUMEN

El estudio analiza las relaciones entre prácticas docentes, clima escolar, empatía y violencia entre pares. La muestra se compone de 385 adolescentes, 219 chicos y 166 chicas ($M=12.94$, $DT=1.77$) de 17 escuelas secundarias de un estado de México, y uno de sus progenitores, 308 madres y 77 padres ($M=42.21$, $DT=8.98$). Se calcula un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales con el programa AMOS. De los resultados se infiere que las prácticas docentes no permisivas y aquellas que implican a familias en la prevención de la violencia se relacionan con una menor agresión entre pares. Además, ambas prácticas docentes se relacionan indirectamente con la violencia entre pares, a través de su efecto en el clima escolar y la empatía. Se concluye que estas prácticas previenen la violencia entre iguales, mejoran el clima escolar y la empatía. Finalmente, se discuten los resultados y sus posibles implicaciones prácticas.

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Palabras clave:

Prácticas docentes

Clima escolar

Empatía

Violencia escolar

PII of original article: S1136-1034(17)30104-1.

[☆] Please cite this article as: Valdés-Cuervo Á-A, Martínez-Ferrer B, Carlos-Martínez E-A. El rol de las prácticas docentes en la prevención de la violencia escolar entre pares. Rev Psicodidact. 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.psicod.2017.05.006>

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Introduction

School violence among peers refers to coercive and intentional physical, verbal and/or relational behaviors aimed at their peers (Jiménez, Musitu, & Murgui, 2008). Research carried out in the United States of America, Europe, and Latin America conclude that between 10% and 40% of adolescents have participated in some violence situation among peers within the school setting (Craig et al., 2009; Díaz-Aguado, Martínez, & Babarro, 2013; Román & Murillo, 2011). The prevalence of this behavior in Mexico is set between 10%

and 25% (National Institute for the Evaluation of Education [INEE], 2007; Valdés & Carlos, 2014).

Victimization is associated to emotional and behavioral problems, integration difficulties in school, and poor academic performance (Cava, Buelga, Musitu, & Murgui, 2010). Aggressors show a higher incidence of behavior problems and psycho-social adjustment difficulties that often persist in adult life (Olweus, 2011). In addition, violence among peers is related to the perception of a negative school environment that hinders learning (Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008).

In view of the gravity of the consequences of peer violence, interventions aimed at preventing this problem have increased. School and teachers are particularly important for the success of these programs (American Educational Research Association [AERA], 2013). However, there is scarce research regarding the role of teaching practices in the prevention of school violence among students. This study examines the relation between non-permissive teaching practices and those involving families with peer-to-peer school violence. The role played by teaching practices within the school climate and empathy are also analyzed.

Teaching practices comprise actions taken by teachers in the teaching-learning process, which may involve students and their families pursuing the creation of a positive environment for learning and peacefully coexistence (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). Non-permissive practices refer to strategies used by teachers facing an episode of peer violence and trying to stop it through different actions such as reasoning with students about the negative effects of violence; establishing agreements to repair the damage caused by aggressive behavior; and non-violent resolution of conflicts (Bauman & del Río, 2005; Wei, Herbert, Chen, & Chang, 2010). On the other hand, teaching practices that involve families in the prevention of violence comprise interventions that foster parental involvement in the development of cognitive and socio-emotional competencies associated with success in school and the respectful coexistence of children (Lacroque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). These practices aim to foster positive parenting, communication with the school, participation in decision making and educational management to support children's learning (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000).

Literature suggests that non-permissive teaching practices are associated with a lower incidence of peer aggression (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). On the other hand, only few studies which that analyze the participation of families in education emphasize that parents' perception of teachers' invitations to active participation in violence prevention, promoting their involvement in this problem (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004). Through these practices, teachers promote that families play an active role in school management processes (Epstein, 2011). Moreover, a better social environment is stimulated, and this is associated with a low incidence of peer violence in school (McDonald, Miller, & Sandler, 2015). The factors mentioned above contribute to enhance the effectiveness of school violence prevention programs (Smith, Cousin, & Stewart, 2005).

In this sense, non-permissive teaching practices and those involving families in peer violence prevention are associated with students' perception of a positive school environment (Bosworth & Judkins, 2014; McSuga-Gage, Simonsen, & Briere, 2012), which is characterized by confidence toward teachers and peers (Zullig, Huebner, & Patton, 2011) and the perception of teachers' support on violence situations (Hanish & Guerra, 2000; Harris, Petrie, & Willoughby, 2002). Likewise, a positive school social environment reduces the involvement of students in violent behaviors in school (Cerezo, Sánchez, Ruíz, & Areense, 2015; Varela, Ávila, & Martínez, 2015).

In addition, teaching practices, as well as school social environment stimulate the development of empathy (Peets,

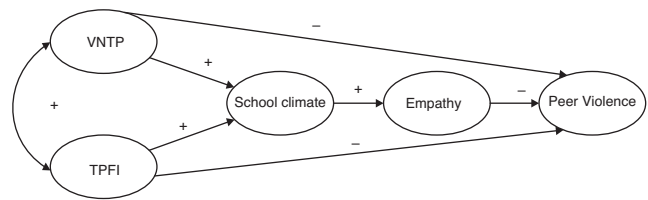


Figure 1. Hypothetic model of the relation between violence non-permissive teaching practices (VNTP), teaching practices involving families (TPFI), school climate, empathy, and peer violence.

Poyhonen, Junoven, & Salmivalli, 2015). In fact, previous studies conclude that the consolidation of an environment of respect and understanding toward peers, in which families and teachers participate, promotes the development of empathy (Grusec, Chaparro, Johnston, & Sherman, 2014; Juujarvi, Myyry, & Pessa, 2012). Moreover, empathy is associated with lesser involvement in peer violence behaviors (Caravita, di Blasio, & Salmivalli, 2009; Perren, Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, Malti, & Hymel, 2012).

Therefore available empirical evidence shows that teaching practices play an important role in explaining violence among peers in school. Also, it has been show that teaching practices and family involvement in school promote the configuration of a positive school social environment and the development of empathy among adolescents. Both variables are associated with a lower frequency of aggressive behaviors among students. However, important issues remain to be unsolved. First, there are no studies that analyze the relationship between teaching practices, school climate, empathy and school violence among peers. Second, research on teaching practices and peer violence among Mexican adolescents is still in its infancy.

Therefore, the goal of this study is to examine the relationships between Mexican teenager students' and their parents' perceptions regarding teaching practices, school environment, empathy, and peer violence. Based on this goal, and as foreseen from the theoretical model proposed (see Figure 1), it is expected that non-permissive teaching practices and those involving families in school violence prevention are directly and indirectly related to a reduction of students' participation on peer violence behaviors, in virtue of their relationships with school climate and empathy. This model is considered to contribute to a better understanding of the role of school context and, above all, the teacher in the prevention of school violence in adolescents.

Method

Participants

The selection of participants was made by a non-probabilistic sampling, whose initial criterion was the availability of the school to participate in the research. This study consists of two sub-samples: adolescents and their parents. The first sub-sample is made up of 385 adolescents enrolled in 17 urban public secondary schools in Sonora, Mexico (219 boys and 166 females), aged between 12 and 15 years ($M=12.94$, $SD=1.77$). Distribution by educational levels is as follows: first course 135 (35.06%), second course 157 (40.78%) and third course 93 (24.16%). The second sub-sample consists of the parents (fathers or mothers) of the participating students, his sub-sample consists of a total of 385 parents (308 mothers and 77 fathers), aged between 33 and 48 years ($M=42.21$, $SD=8.98$).

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