STUDENTS PERCEPTION ON SCHOOL COEXISTENCE: A STUDY ON CONTRIBUTIONS OF SUPPORT SYSTEMS BETWEEN EQUALS (SAIS) IN BRAZILIAN AND SPANISH SCHOOL INSTITUTIONS

A PERCEPÇÃO DE ESTUDANTES SOBRE A CONVIVÊNCIA NA ESCOLA: UM ESTUDO SOBRE CONTRIBUIÇÕES DOS SISTEMAS DE APOIO ENTRE IGUAIS (SAIS) EM INSTITUIÇÕES ESCOLARES BRASILEIRAS E ESPANHOLAS

LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS ESTUDIANTES SOBRE LA CONVIVENCIA EN LA ESCUELA: ESTUDIO SOBRE CONTRIBUCIONES DE LOS SITEMAS DE APOYO ENTRE IGUALES (SAIS) EN INSTITUCIONES ESCOLARES BRASILEÑAS Y ESPAÑOLAS

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ABSTRACT: The world literature has indicated more effective ways of prevention and intervention to bullying and its consequences in school. They are strategies that rely on the quality improvement of the school climate and the implementation of Support Systems between Equals (SAI). The present research seeks to verify students' perceptions regarding the quality of coexistence in schools with and without the implementation of a type of SAI called "Help Teams"(HT), a Spanish model adapted to the Brazilian schools. For that, a field research was carried out, with an exploratory and descriptive character, using a questionnaire between students from Brazil and Spain. Participated in this investigation 756 students of Brazilian Schools, 454 with the HT and 302 without HT and 438 Spain, 243 with HT and 195 without HT. The results show better quality in interpersonal relationships in schools with Help Teams. However, comparing the perception of the interpersonal relations of students from Brazilian and Spanish, even in Brazilian schools with SAI implemented, there are more problems than in Spanish schools that do not have such a model of work with the students. Although the coexistence theme is present in the Brazilian Law, the model is still recent and there are no

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public policies for the educational programs implementation to prevent these problems as in Spain.

KEYWORDS: Coexistence. Support Systems between Equals (SAIs). Bullying.

RESUMO: *A literatura mundial tem indicado formas mais eficazes de prevenção e intervenção ao bullying e suas consequências na escola. São estratégias que se apoiam na melhoria da qualidade do clima escolar e na implantação de Sistemas de Apoio entre Iguais (SAI). A presente investigação busca verificar a percepção dos estudantes em relação à qualidade da convivência em escolas com e sem a implantação de um tipo de SAI chamado "Equipes de Ajuda", um modelo espanhol adaptado às escolas brasileiras. Para isso foi realizada uma pesquisa de campo, de caráter exploratório e descritivo utilizando-se de um questionário entre estudantes do Brasil da Espanha. Participaram dessa investigação 756 estudantes de Escolas brasileiras, 454 de escolas com as EAs e 302 de escolas sem EAs; e 438 estudantes da Espanha, 243 de escolas com EAs e 195 de escolas sem EAs. Os resultados evidenciam melhor qualidade nas relações interpessoais em escolas com Equipes de Ajuda. Contudo, comparando a percepção das relações interpessoais de estudantes de escolas brasileiras e espanholas, em escolas brasileiras, mesmo com SAI implantado tem-se mais problemas do que em escolas espanholas que não possuem tal modelo de trabalho com os alunos. Entende-se que o modelo brasileiro é ainda recente e que, embora a temática da convivência esteja presente em leis brasileiras, não se dispõe de políticas públicas para a implementação de programas educacionais de prevenção aos problemas de convivência como na Espanha.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Convivência. Sistemas de apoio entre pares (SAIs). Bullying.*

RESUMEN: *La literatura mundial ha señalado formas más eficaces de prevención e intervención al bullying y sus consecuencias en la escuela. Se tratan de estrategias que se apoyan en la mejora de calidad del clima escolar y en la implantación de Sistemas de Apoyo entre Iguales (SAI). La investigación busca verificar la percepción de los estudiantes respecto a la calidad de la convivencia en escuelas con y sin la implantación de un tipo de SAI llamado "Equipos de Ayuda", un modelo español adaptado a las escuelas brasileñas. Para ello se realizó una investigación de campo, de carácter exploratorio y descriptivo utilizando un cuestionario entre estudiantes de Brasil y España. Participaron de esta investigación 756 estudiantes de Escuelas brasileñas, 454 con los EAs y 302 sin EAs y 438 de España, 243 con EAs y 195 sin EAs. Los resultados evidencian mejor calidad en las relaciones interpersonales en escuelas con Equipos de Ayuda. Sin embargo, comparando la percepción de las relaciones interpersonales de estudiantes de escuelas brasileñas y españolas, en escuelas brasileñas, aunque con SAI implantado hay más problemas que en escuelas españolas que no poseen tal modelo de trabajo con los alumnos. Se comprende que el modelo brasileño es aún reciente y que, aunque al tema de la convivencia esté presente en la Ley, no se dispone de políticas públicas para la implementación de programas educativos para prevenir estos problemas como en España.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Convivencia. Sistema de apoyo entre iguales (SAIs). Bullying*

Introduction

The first studies on bullying in Brazil, published in the mid-2000s (FANTE, 2005; LEME, 2006; FRANCISCO; LIBÓRIO, 2009), aimed at diagnosing the problem in public and private schools in the interior of São Paulo. Similar relationships have been established with the results found in research from other countries indicating a worrying incidence of bullying in the school context (OLWEUS, 1993; MASCARENHAS, 2009; GINI; POZZOLI; HAUSER, 2010; CURWEN; MCNICHOL; SHARPE, 2011; FISCHER, 2010; FRICK, 2011; KRASSELT, 2014; TOGNETTA, 2010; TOGNETTA; VINHA, 2010; COWIE; MYERS, 2016; AVILÉS MARTINÉZ, 2013).

In view of this problem, the research detailed in the following paragraphs is part of a group of investigations that since 2013 have been focusing on the study of the phenomenon of bullying from the perspective of the absence of moral values. Such investigations seek a greater understanding of the psychological mechanisms of students as victims, aggressors and spectators, and the analysis of the teachers' moral engagements or disengagements in the face of bullying situations. The actions of this project are subdivided into three main axes of research. The first axis evaluates the effectiveness of intervention strategies based on Support Systems between Equals - the Help Teams, idealized by Avilés (2008) in Spain and adapted to the reality of Brazilian schools. In this context, students' perceptions regarding the reduction or not of different forms of intimidation, students' self-efficacy beliefs to help their colleagues, actively interfering in bullying situations and adherence to the moral values of justice and solidarity between participating members of help teams (LAPA; ALVES; TOGNETTA, 2017; ALVES; TOGNETTA, 2016; BOMFIM; TOGNETTA, 2016).

The second axis seeks to verify the students' perception of bullying and bullying in university environments and to know the perception of the discipline of parental education used by students who participate in situations of intimidation as well as SAIs implemented in schools. (KNOENER; TOGNETTA, 2016; DE NADAI; TOGNETTA, 2016).

Finally, in the third axis, which refers to teacher formation, we analyze the ways in which teachers engage or disengage morally in the face of situations of intimidation either with typical or provocative victims (SANTOS; TOGNETTA, 2016; GONÇALVES; ANDRADE; TOGNETTA, 2017).

Presenting the general context of the research's groups of studies, this article seeks to deepen the discussion of the theme around the first axis, according to the students' perception

of the quality of coexistence in schools and the school climate in institutions with and without the implementation of an SAI (the Help Teams).

School climate and well-being at school

Different concepts and approaches regarding the school climate are found in the literature. Despite the conceptual differences between the authors, we understand the school climate as the set of perceptions that individuals have in relation to the educational institution (VINHA *et al*., 2016). The school climate includes subjective evaluations regarding factors such as organization, administrative and pedagogical structures and also the quality of human relationships, including values, attitudes, feelings and sensations that occur in the school space. (CUNHA; COSTA, 2009; GAZIEL, 1987; JANOSZ, 1998; LOUKAS, 2007; THIÉBAUD, 2005 *apud* VINHA *et al.,* 2016; TOGNETTA; KNOENER; BOMFIM; DE NADAI, 2017).

According to Brunet (2001) the term school climate derives from the concept of organizational climate, which has been used since the 1960s in the administrative sector, having also influenced issues related to School Management. The author cites the principles by which the first questionnaires on behavior and leadership were developed by Halpin and Crofts (1963), stating that people's behavior is influenced by their perception "of the work environment, which is in turn, widely determined by the behavior of company executives" (BRUNET, 2011, p. 4, our translation). Then, he assesses that Likert (1974) grouped the indicators and determined two types of prevailing climates in schools: the authoritarian climate and the participatory climate.

When comparing the two theories Brunet (2001) highlights that the teachers' perceptions about the internal functioning of the organization is what determines their behaviors, which in turn will also influence organizational effectiveness. In the same way, other studies have led the author to affirm that in addition to teachers, students are also sensitive to the work environment in schools and that this perception can influence not only their behavior in the classroom but also their school performance (BROOKOVER *et al.*, 1979; ELLET; WALBERG, 1979; GIBSON, 1974; DOW, 1983; BANDURA, 1969; SAVOIE, 1993; OWENS, 1998 *apud* BRUNET, 2001).

About the dimensions of the climate, Janoz (1998) proposes the distribution in five interrelated dimensions to assess whether the disposition of the environment is favorable to learning (emphasis added): the relational climate, the safety climate, the educational climate, the climate of justice and finally, the climate of belonging (JANOZ, 1998 *apud* VINHA *et al.*, 2016, p. 7).

Another way of categorizing students' perceptions was addressed by Ferrans and Selman (2014). The authors indicate four levels of climate perception - security, order, care and empowerment - and examine them according to the types of environments they comprise: an authoritarian, negligent or cohesive environment identifying important relationships between a climate in which students feel safe and the cohesive environment determined by its authorities. The same authors relate the perception of the school climate with the way students react in situations of bullying: in negligent environments, students feel much less secure. They also feel more exposed to bullying situations in environments where they do not feel they belong and cannot even act as protagonists.

This research corroborates other investigations that have already been concluded that there may be a close relationship between the climate and the type of constituted sociomoral environment. However, schools that have a more positive climate - dictated by the set of different dimensions - do not always have environments that allow the prevention and intervention of phenomena such as bullying, as proved by Wrege (2017).

In Brazil, Frick (2013) carried out an investigation through observation in two classrooms with the aim of analyzing the relationships between the environments established by the teachers and the students' ways of acting in the face of conflicts between peers. The principles of this study are in line with Piaget's theory (1994) on the importance of cooperation and self-regulation in the development of intelligence, morality and personality. The author found that environment A - indicated by the school management as the class with the highest number of conflicts - was characterized as predominantly coercive. The rules were imposed by the teacher and relations were based on unilateral respect. The teacher centralized all decisions within herself and, in breach of the rules, she used expiatory sanctions such as punishments and threats, and also had prizes to achieve control of the discipline. On the other hand, environment B - indicated by management as the class with the lowest rate of conflicts - was categorized as predominantly cooperative. In this class the rules were clear and respected by everyone, including the teacher. Social exchanges were stimulated when the teacher asked students to help each other, generating feelings of respect, friendship and care for each other.

Frick (2013) also highlights the importance of reflecting on the conduct of the entire educational community on the forms of social relations to develop anti-bullying and violence prevention projects. These measures based on democratic principles and mutual respect for the improvement of the climate and coexistence have been thought by several authors involved in teacher formation strategies to prevent the bullying phenomenon (ALMEIDA, 2008; AVILÉS, 2006; COWIE; SMITH, 2002; DEL REY; ORTEGA, 2001; DÍAZ-AGUADO, 2005; MENIN,

2002; TOGNETTA; VINHA, 2007; VINHA; NUNES; TOGNETTA, 2017). In a word: the prevention and intervention of bullying is only possible when the constituted environment allows relationships of trust, participation and empathy between peers.

Law 13,185/2015 and ways to overcome bullying

In force since 2016, Brazilian law institutes a nationwide program to combat systematic intimidation (bullying) and defines the term as being "any act of physical or psychological violence, intentional and repetitive that occurs without evident motivation, practiced by a individual or group". The law also emphasizes that the purpose of these acts is to intimidate or attack "causing pain and anguish to the victim, in a relationship of power imbalance between the parties involved" (BRASIL, 2015, our translation).

Among the objectives of the program are the promotion of measures to raise awareness and prevent all types of violence, especially those resulting from intimidation practices. It also emphasizes that such practices, which result in physical and psychological constraint, must be avoided and prevented by both students and teachers, including all members of the school community.

In 2018, the following items were also added to article 12 of LDB 9394/96, which determines the responsibilities of educational establishments: "IX - promote measures to raise awareness, prevent and combat all types of violence, especially systematic intimidation (bullying), in the context of schools" and "X - establish actions aimed at promoting a culture of peace in schools" (Included by Law no. 13,663, of 2018, our translation).

However, it will not be possible to overcome coexistence problems in which bullying is the main issue while the management of Brazilian schools is restricted to the preparation of sporadic booklets and awareness campaigns, or that point out strategies for outsourcing the school problem (such as the indication of police at school or even the validation of uncritical referrals to guardianship councils).

The law is quite clear in pointing out the need for more consistent actions to be developed that aim not only to contain the problem, but mainly to implement actions aimed at its prevention. Among the goals for overcoming bullying is the formation of teachers to act in solving the problem, psychological assistance to victims and psychological treatment to aggressors (instead of punishing them, to change their behavior). In particular, one should consider the possibilities of formation of the subjects involved in the problem directly or indirectly.

In view of such recent measures and the lack of research on the effectiveness of programs to combat bullying in Brazil, we seek references in studies in Spain where the *Programa Educativo para a Prevención de Maltrato entre Compañeros y Compañeras* (Educational Program for the Prevention of Maltreatment among Peers) has existed since 1997. In this period, strategic preventive actions of bullying had the encouragement of the Ministry of Education and Science and the collaboration of the University of Seville (ORTEGA, 1998)

It is known that issues related to coexistence, emotional and social well-being of students and bullying have interdependent relationships, are related to each other and, therefore, must be worked together (AVILÉS, 2018). That said, it is understood that strategies to combat bullying do not work only as specific interventions to cases that, mainly, as evidenced by different investigations, do not always reach the ears of the authorities (LIVINGSTONE *et al*., 2011; SMITH; SHU, 2000).

One of the most effective ways to overcome the characteristic problems of peer relations is the action of the peers themselves with the students. These are the tasks proposed in Support Systems between Equals (SAIs, Portuguese initials) (AVILÉS, 2017; 2018) that can be considered a milestone in strategies for improving coexistence, resolving conflicts and preventing Bullying and Cyberbullying. These strategies are supported by the contributions of youth protagonism to the monitoring of situations of intimidation and in the search for collaborative solutions, generally improving the school climate both in the classroom and at school. (AVILÉS, 2017; COWIE; OLAFSSON, 2000; COWIE; WALLACE, 2006; NAYLOR; COWIE, 1999 *apud* AVILÉS, 2018).

Several forms of support among equals are described by Naylor (2010), among which we can mention the services that manage informational, monitoring or advisory content. However, in general they all involve problem solving, active listening and communicative skills. According to Cowie and Wallace (2006) the implementation of this form of protagonism can vary according to each country and educational culture and the adaptations appear even if the consistency with the planned objectives is maintained. Thus, during the implementation process, regular specialized formative measures are required in all sectors, from management, tutors and students, so that SAIs become sustainable. Research in Brazil resulting from current studies has shown the relevance of teacher formation that, in addition to instrumentalizing and sensitizing them to work with the problem of intimidation between peers and its consequences, also provides their effective participation in the monitoring of students participating in SAIs (TOGNETTA; DAUD, 2017; LAPA, 2019; VINHA; NUNES; TOGNETTA, 2018).

In this article, we will deal only with a specific type of SAI, which has been adapted to the reality of Brazilian schools: The Help Teams.

What are Help Teams?

Help Teams are a type of Support System between Equals (SAI) (AVILÉS, 2017; 2018) that motivates students to volunteer in promoting actions to improve ethical coexistence. This group is formed through the appointment of classmates themselves. Those chosen undergo formation that will provide resources to help students with difficulties in socializing, intimidation and even other problems characteristic of school life. Together, team members find support and feel encouraged to act and seek ways to overcome bullying situations. The actions carried out by members of the help teams involve welcoming students, in order to make themselves available to listen to their problems and assertively support them (AVILÉS, 2018; LAPA; TOGNETTA, 2016; ALVES; TOGNETTA, 2016; TOGNETTA *et al.*, 2017).

Among the most relevant characteristics of the peer help programs, it can be highlighted the performance in relation to students, teachers and the educational community as those who are instigators of improving the coexistence between people. It is up to the students of Help Teams to create opportunities for help to materialize with those to whom neither teachers nor parents have access to problems. They are students who approach those who always seem to be alone at the time of the break, who carry out academic activities that unite the students of the school, or who act as a support so that those they help are able to solve their problems of living together. To achieve these goals, formation courses for students will serve to prepare them in relation to listening skills, empathy and understanding the needs and feelings of those seeking help. (COWIE; FERNÁNDEZ, 2006; COWIEEOZTUG, 2008; SELLMAN, 2011 *apud* VALERO *et al.*, 2013; TOGNETTA *et al.*, 2015).

Objectives

The investigations we are currently conducting show us a close relationship between the implementation of Support Systems and the improvement of interpersonal relationships at school. This means pointing out two important issues: the first concerns how much in these researches we have reiterated the fact, already present in the literature (AVILÉS; TORRES; VIAN, 2008; COWIE; FERNÁNDEZ, 2006), that the immediate reduction in the frequency of

bullying among peers is not always one of the most fruitful results of the insertion of a SAI at school.

In a previous investigation (TOGNETTA; ALVES; LAPA, 2019) we found statistically significant differences between 9 of the 20 types of violence that could be perceived by students after the implementation of the Help Teams in a public school in the interior of São Paulo. Positive balance, without a doubt, if we stick to the question that although only 9 of the 20 forms of intimidation presented, in the others, there was no noticeable increase in its occurrence. But this is not the most recurring result that we have encountered. In a recent survey (LAPA, 2019) we found that if we compare the movement of the frequency of intimidation perceived by students as targets of bullying, in one year and after two years of implementing the Help Teams, we do not have a regression of the problem, but a increase in the first year and then a slight decrease in the second. In another survey that we conducted (ALVES, 2019) we also did not find an increase in self-efficacy beliefs to help among school students with help teams during the same period of time. On the contrary, they were decreasing.

These results indicate a very common phenomenon that occurs when students are "awakened" to the awareness that what was previously considered "play" becomes something that impels the other to suffering. They also refer to the fact that, in schools where there are Help Teams, everyone, whether or not participating in these groups, is aware of the effort, preparation and seriousness of the work of the members chosen to intervene.

This means that efforts to change the frequency of systematic intimidation must be added to the time to consolidate the actions and even the awareness of everyone in the educational community.

The second issue that we propose to think about was exactly the fact that the frequency of intimidation cannot be reduced in a short period of time, which does not mean that there is no improvement in the quality of interpersonal relationships as a whole and, mainly, in the well-being conditions that we want our schools to contemplate (AVILÉS; TORRES; VIÁN, 2008; AVILÉS; PETTA, 2018). This is the key to presenting the questions of our current research problem: How do teenagers feel at school? What is the perception of students about the quality of coexistence in the school context? Would there be differences in perceptions regarding these issues between students who live in schools where the Help Teams were implemented and those in which there was no such work? If we compare two different realities - Spanish schools whose SAIs model completes at least 10 years of implementation, and Brazil, in its second year of implementation, would we have significant differences? In the same way, would we find corresponding data between schools in which there is no SAI in Brazil and Spain?

We start from the hypothesis that in schools where SAIs are implemented, students' perception of the quality of the school climate is better in relation to well-being and interpersonal relationships. In the same way, we think that Spanish schools, whose model of insertion of Public Policies that direct coexistence as a theme determined by law to be worked in school institutions (including the formation of teachers to act in this sense), will prove themselves more prone to their students' better perceptions of the quality of relationships of trust, friendship as well as other issues related to living in their environment.

We can summarize our research problem in the following questions: are there differences between the quality of the perceived coexistence among students from schools in which a type of SAI was implanted and from schools in which there is no such work? Are there differences between the perception of Brazilian and Spanish students about coexistence before and after the implementation of SAIs in schools?

Faced with such questions, we established the following objectives for this research:

1. Investigate the quality of interpersonal relationships in schools in the perception of students, establishing a comparison between schools in Brazil with and without help teams.

2. Investigate the quality of interpersonal relationships in schools in the perception of students, establishing a comparison between schools with help teams in Brazil and Spain.

3. Investigate the quality of interpersonal relationships in schools in the perception of students, establishing a comparison between schools without help teams in Brazil and Spain.

Material and Methods

This is an exploratory and descriptive field research carried out using an instrument with closed questions for which the respondents point out one of the multiple alternatives. The research was carried out considering a quantitative analysis of the answers presented for the INSEBULL questionnaire (AVILÉS; ELICES, 2007). The research instrument proposed in this research received authorization from the Ethics Committee of the College of Sciences and Letters of Unesp according to CAAE numbers 68795017.4.0000.5400; 66076917.6.0000.5400; 65373417.0.0000.5400; 66086617.6.0000.5400.

The complete questionnaire covers various characteristics of adolescents living at school, especially regarding intimidation conducted between peers. However, to carry out the present investigation, only questions that are not directly related to bullying were used, but rather to the climate between peers and to the authority and, consequently, to the quality of coexistence in schools.

The sample was selected for convenience. In Spain, 243 students from schools in which the Help Teams program is already implemented and 195 students from schools that do not have any type of SAIs have participated in this research. In Brazil, 454 students from public and private schools in the metropolitan region of Campinas-SP participated in the investigation, who had in their schools the implementation of Help Teams, and 302 students from public and private schools in the same region where the program was not implemented.
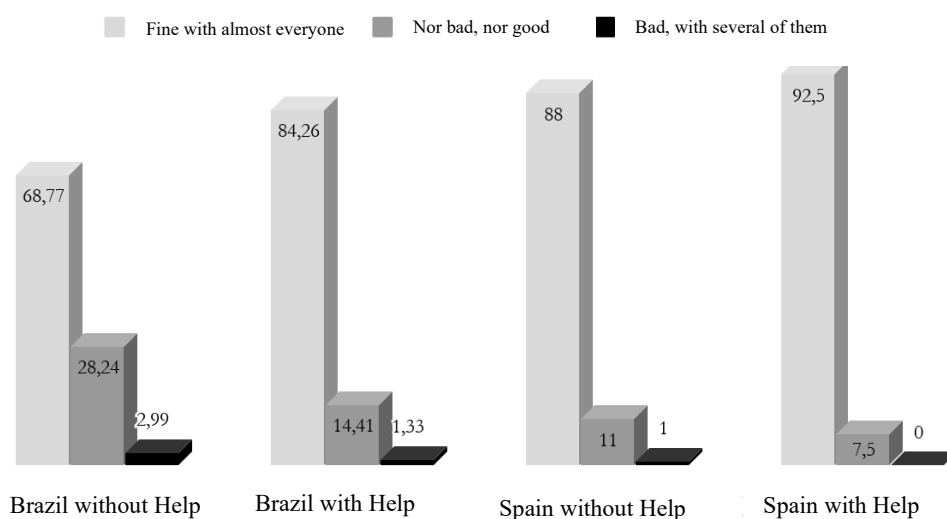
All associations were verified and statistically proven. Significant differences were analyzed by applying Fisher's exact test, adopting a significance level of 5%. Regarding the choice of the test we can say that, although the chi-square test is the most commonly used in statistics, it becomes inadequate when the sample size is small, or when the data is very unevenly distributed among the table cells, resulting in low expected values. In the case of the present research, the expected values in the cells of some contingency tables are below 5, therefore, Fisher's exact test was presented as ideal (PAGANO; GAUVREAU, 2004).

Results

To search for answers on the quality of school coexistence, we analyzed the seven items that dealt with the quality of coexistence at school in the students' perception. The first item refers to the relationship with colleagues.

Figurr 1 – Graph comparing samples from Brazil and Spain for question 2 of INSEBULL

How do you relate to most of your colleagues?

Legend: Fine with almost everyone | Nor bad, nor good | Bad, with several of them

	Brazil without Help	Brazil with Help	Spain without Help	Spain with Help
Fine with almost everyone	68,77	84,26	88	92,5
Nor bad, nor good	28,24	14,41	11	7,5
Bad, with several of them	2,99	1,33	1	0

Source: Devised by the authors

Luciene Regina Paulino TOGNETTA; José Maria Avilés MARTÍNEZ; Raul Alves DE SOUZA; Lídia Morcelli DUARTE and Sandra Trambaiolli DE NADAI

Regarding the question: "***How do you relate to most of your colleagues?***", Among students who participate in schools with help team programs, 84.3% of Brazilians answered that they relate well with almost everyone, while in Spain this percentage is 92.5%. In schools without aid teams, 68.8% of Brazilians have a good relationship with almost everyone, compared to 88% of Spaniards.

In schools without aid teams, 28.2% of Brazilians responded that they relations are neither good nor bad. Among the Spanish, this percentage drops to 11%. When observing the students who participate in schools with help teams, 14% of Brazilians do not relate either good or bad relations, while among Spaniards, only 7.5% marked this option.

Among those who marked the option that points out that they have poor relationships with many colleagues, we have 3% of Brazilian students without help teams, 1.33% of Brazilians with help teams and 1% of Spaniards without help teams. No Spanish student who participates in schools with the team program has chosen the option of a possible bad relationship with colleagues.

All of these percentage differences are significant (p <0.01) and indicate that the number of students who have a good relationship with most peers is greater in schools that receive support from helpers. At the same time, the percentage of those who relate badly or neither well nor badly is quite small in these schools. As for the quality of friendships at school, with the help of figure 2 we can also see some differences.

Figure 2 – Graph comparing samples from Brazil and Spain for question 3 of INSEBULL

How many good and true friendships do you have at school?
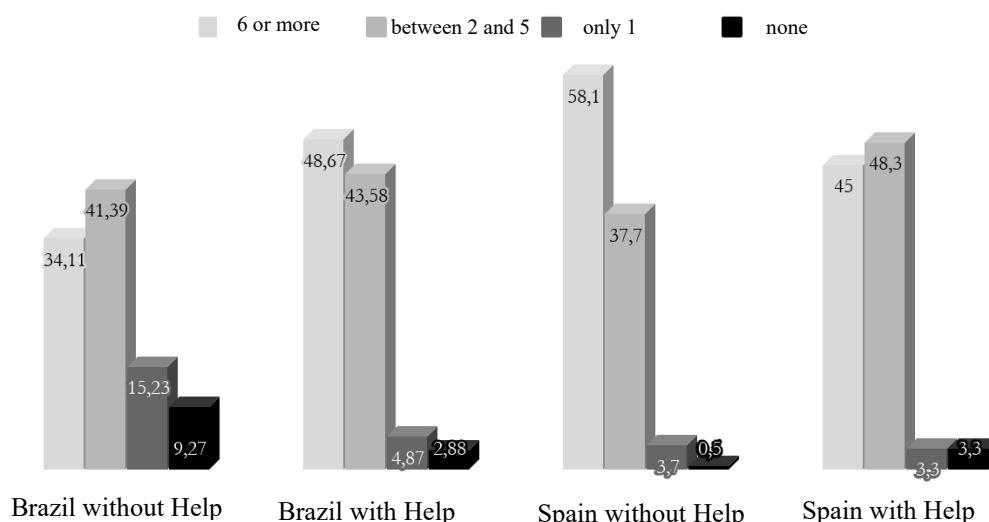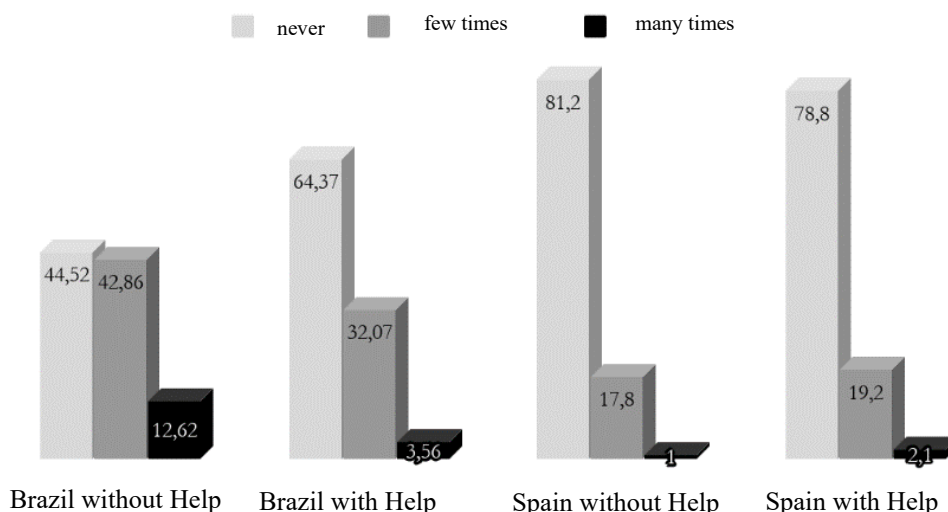

Source: Devised by the authors

No noticeable differences were found in relation to Spanish students, however, among Brazilian students, we identified important differences regarding students' perception of friendship. The answers to the question "***How many good and true friendships do you have at school?***" indicate that 9.27% of students who do not participate in the help team program do not have any friends at school and 15.23% have only one friend. Still on the unaided Brazilians, 41.39% of the students indicate that they have between 2 and 5 friends and 34.11% stated that they have more than 6 good and true friendships.

On the other hand, in schools with help teams, the percentage of students who have no friends drops to 2.88% and 4.87% are those who have only one friend. Those who scored between 2 and 5 friends increased to 43.58% and those who indicated having more than 6 friends increased to 48.67%. The difference found is only significant between the group of Brazilians - with and without Aid Teams.

Figure 3 – Graph comparing samples from Brazil and Spain for question 4 of INSEBULL

How often do you feel alone in the recess because your companions have no desire to be with you?

Source: Devised by the authors

Figure 3 deals with the answers to the question: ***"How often do you feel alone in the playground because your companions have no desire to be with you?"***. Among Brazilian students without help, 44.52% stated that they never feel alone, 42.86% feel alone a few times and 12.62% indicate that they feel alone many times. When we compare these data with students who receive support from help teams, the number of students who never feel alone increases to 64.37% in Brazil and 78.8% in Spain. The number of students who marked the option that they feel alone few times decreases to 32.1% in Brazil and 19.2% in Spain. Among

those who indicated that they feel alone many times, the percentage also dropped to 3.6% in Brazil and 2.1% in Spain. The difference is significant between Brazilians and between Brazilians and Spaniards. The following is the data on the perception of how they feel at school.

Figure 4 – Graph comparing samples from Brazil and Spain for question 5 of INSEBULL

How do you feel at school?
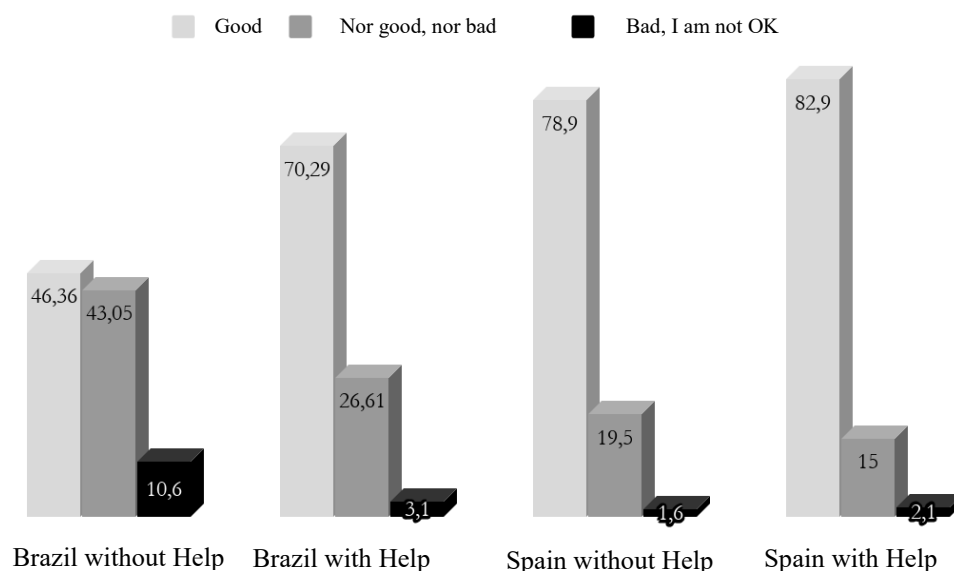
Source: Devised by the authors

Figure 4 also points out significant differences, both in Brazil and in Spain in relation to the support of the teams. When we analyze the question: ***"How do you feel at school?"*** we found that among the students who checked the option that they feel good, we have 46.36% of Brazilians without help compared to 70.29% of Brazilians with help and 82.9% of Spaniards with help. Among the students who indicated that they feel neither good nor bad, we have 43.05% of Brazilians without help, 26.61% of Brazilians with help and 15% of Spaniards with help. When we look at students who marked the option that they feel bad and are not doing well at school, the data are 10.6% of Brazilians without help compared to 3.1% of Brazilians with help and 2.1% of Spaniards with help and 1.6% in schools without Help Teams. Therefore, the percentage of students who feel good at school is higher in schools that develop the help team programs and the percentage of those who feel bad, or neither good nor bad is lower in these same conditions both in Brazil and in Spain. (p <0.01).

Figure 5 – Graph comparing samples from Brazil and Spain for question 6 of INSEBULL

How do your teachers treat you?
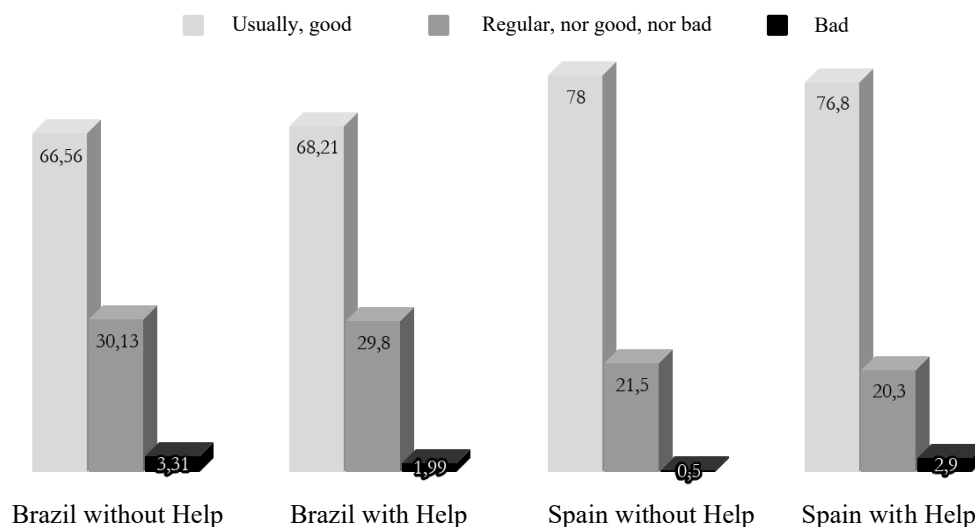
Source: Devised by the author

Figure 5 deals with the quality of the relationship between teacher and student. When looking at the data related to the question ***"How do your teachers treat you?"*** we noticed that there were no significant differences between schools without help teams and with help teams (p = 0.53). However, if we compare the responses of Brazilian students without help, with Spaniards without help, we will see that the percentage of those who are normally treated well is 66.6% of Brazilian students and 78% of Spanish students. Among those who marked the option neither good nor bad are 30.1% of Brazilians compared to 21.5% of Spaniards. Among those who claim that teachers treat them badly, we have 3.3% of Brazilian students and only 0.5% of Spanish students. Thus, we can say that, regardless of the results of the implementation of the help teams, Spanish students feel better treated by their teachers than Brazilian students and this difference is significant (p <0.01).

Figure 6 – Graph comparing samples from Brazil and Spain for question 8 of INSEBULL

Have you ever been afraid to come to school?
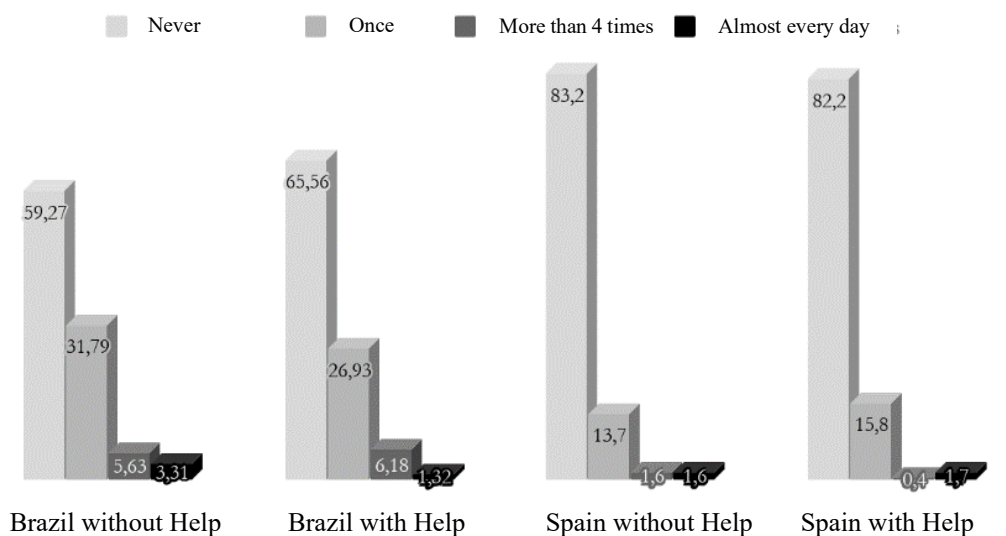
Source: Devised by the authors

On the question ***"Have you ever been afraid to come to school?"***, We find that, in the same way, the biggest difference found is between Brazilian students and Spanish students, regardless of the implementation of the program. Among the students who pointed out that they are not afraid are 59.3% of Brazilians and 83.2% of Spaniards who are not part of schools with help teams. In this same group without help, 31.8% of Brazilians reported that they were afraid to go to school once compared to 13.7% of Spaniards. The students who checked the option that they felt afraid to go to school more than four times are 5.6% of Brazilians and 1.6% of Spaniards in schools without Aid Teams. As for the alternative that they are afraid to go to school almost every day, we have 3.3% of Brazilian students and 1.6% of Spanish students (p <0.01) still from these same schools. The differences between school models and between countries are, again, all significant (p <0.01).

In relation to Figure 7, we have the comparison of the results for the question ***"Mark what would be the cause of this fear"***. The question brings 5 alternatives, and the student could check more than one answer. The results of Brazilian schools with and without aid teams were similar. However, schools in Spain have significant differences that can serve as a diagnosis for a problem in Brazilian schools.

Figure 7 – Graph comparing samples from Brazil and Spain for question 9 of INSEBULL

Mark the cause of this fear (you can check more than one answer)
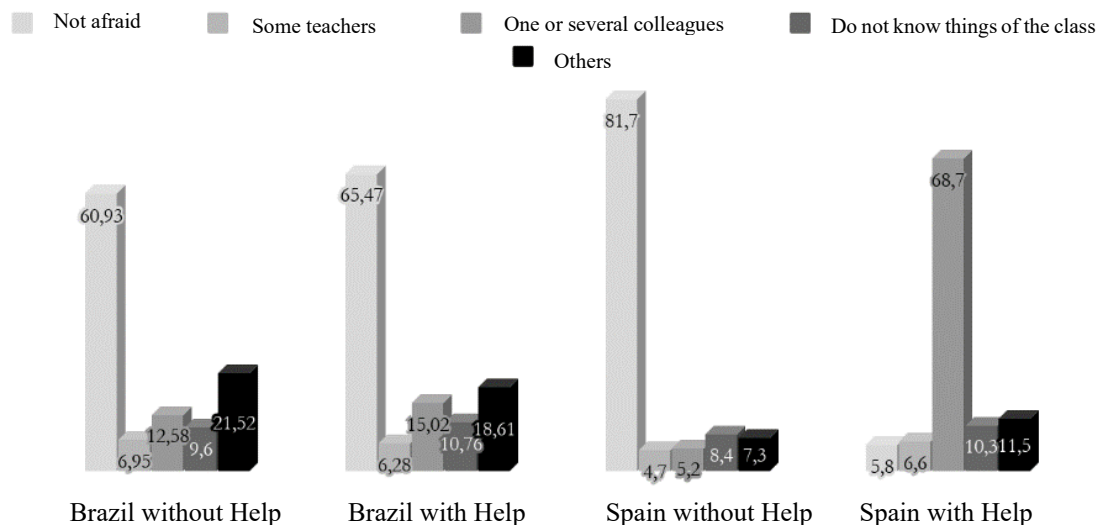
Source: Devised by the authors

In schools in Spain without aid teams, 81.7% marked option A - I am not afraid. In Spanish schools with help, only 5.8% marked this same option. About alternative C - I am afraid of one or more colleagues, only 5.2% of Spaniards without help marked this option, while 68.7% of students who participate in schools with help teams recognize that they are afraid of some companions. Among the other causes of fear, such as: fear of some teachers, fear of not knowing the things of the class or other reasons, it is noteworthy that in Spain, in schools with Help Teams, students point out the fear of some colleagues (68.7%).

Discussion

Despite the degree of subjectivity present in the perceptions of the small sample participating in this investigation, there are answers to the questions that gave rise to the present study: the results obtained demonstrate that the implementation of help teams in Brazilian schools contributed to the improvement of coexistence among students although, in other investigations conducted in parallel to this, a small modification has been found, over time, of the frequencies of intimidation between peers.

When establishing comparisons between samples, we could see that, in general, Spanish students feel better at school than Brazilian students. However, it was possible to note that in Brazil, the percentage of students who feel good at school is higher in schools that develop help

team programs, and the percentage of those who feel bad, or neither good nor bad, is much lower in schools where the program has not been implemented.

Even in the face of a highly complex problem such as bullying, which goes beyond social dimensions, it is possible to recognize the contributions that the implementation of an SAI can offer to improve school coexistence. Such data indicate that the role of children and adolescents seems to be one of the viable possibilities for overcoming problems of this order in schools.

Similar results involving the Support Systems between Equals have also been found in surveys from other countries, both in monitoring cases and in situations of conflict and mistreatment (AVILÉS, 2012; 2013; 2014; 2017; AVILÉS; TORRES; VIÁN, 2008; COWIE; FERNANDEZ, 2006; NAYLOR; COWIE, 2000; NAYLOR, 2010 *apud* AVILÉS, 2018), as well as improving the general coexistence and school climate of the group and the school (AVILÉS, 2017; COWIE; OLAFSSON, 2000; COWIE; WALLACE, 2006; NAYLOR; COWIE, 1999 *apud* AVILÉS 2018).

Gini *et al*. (2008) proved that the victim of bullying was more liked by colleagues in classrooms where viewers defended them and, therefore, created bonds of friendship. It is a fact already described in the literature that the victims have difficulty in having friends, which, added to other reasons, makes them more vulnerable to the attack of the authors of bullying. Thus, having Help Teams can consolidate the strengthening of friendships that act as a shield against victimization by those who feel fragile.

So, having friends and feeling safe is it important? In the research by Caravita, Gini and Pozzoli (2012), the authors indicate two forms of social status that are widespread among peers: the social preference regarding the degree to which the person is accepted or rejected by others and the perceived popularity, that is, how much one becomes visible, prominent and powerful in front of others. What is known is that bullying is associated negatively with social preference and positively with perceived popularity. Thus, having good friends at school and feeling accepted in the school environment can minimize a cruel dynamic that instigates violence to those who feel different. The results of this investigation pointed out how important the nature of social relationships is for the quality of the school environment: it is noted that, in schools with help teams, both in Brazil and in Spain, maintaining a good relationship with friends is a differential.

However, when we look at the results of the relationship with teachers, we notice that in Brazilian schools there still seems to be a difference in terms of the quality of these

relationships. The data echo the results of other investigations conducted in Brazil and which demonstrate the difficulty of Brazilian teachers in establishing practices of respectful coexistence other than through obedience and punishment.

Fischer's research (2010) proved that teachers recognize the problem of bullying and its cruelest consequences, but, in these same schools, when asked, students say that there is no intervention of any kind to the highlighted problems. In a recent survey, Gonçalves (2011) also proved how much the teachers' assessment of their students' social relationship problems is loaded with moral disengagements according to which the victims are responsible for the provocations they receive. In a hostile environment, certainly, without the acknowledgment of the lack of respect on the part of those who act, made by the teacher and, without the support of peers, it will be difficult to overcome the victimization condition experienced by male and female students in our schools. Thus, it is possible to reiterate how the practice of implementing a support system between equals can contribute to the quality of the relationships established at the school and the feeling of belonging and even the security necessary for the development of our students.

What about the performance of teachers? The "fear of teachers" shows us how much in Brazil the need for public policies that allow the continued formation of teachers is crucial for overcoming the problems of coexistence at school.

The differences found between the Spanish and Brazilian models can be explained according to the conditions of education in these two countries. In Brazil, although recently incorporated into the LDB, the anti-bullying law is new and does not support the development of educational teacher formation policies that are implemented in Brazilian schools. Nor, therefore, that they become sustainable to the point that it is a *sine qua non* condition that teachers can approach the theme of coexistence as an essential content of the curricular dimension of their work.

Final considerations

The various investigations that we have conducted in Brazil have shown us that the benefits brought about by the implementation of Support Systems between Equals (SAIs) are not directly related to the direct and rapid decrease in the frequency of intimidation, but, rather, first and progressively, to the quality of the relationships lived and feelings of worth, security and friendships. Only with the sustainability of the program it will be possible to quantitatively reduce the frequency of bullying and overcome it. Bullying is a problem in group relations and

its complex dynamics do not allow it to be overcome immediately. It is necessary, first of all, that the environment be favorable and that the "spirit" of the school and its participants be modified.

Thus, the results of this investigation point to important differences in the perception of those who belong to the school environment and concern the necessary well-being so that, in fact, one can modify stiff structures of non-moral values more important than generosity, respect, tolerance to the different. These are not modified by a specific action, but by a set of thoughtful, intentional, planned actions that transform the school environment. In an environment where you feel supported, safe, without fear, with friends it is possible to show to the aggressors, and sensitize them, the model of relationships that are valued there (MENESINI *et al*., 2003). As a result, those who are attacked may be more willing to communicate what is happening to them and seek help. In this way, communication gains prominence in the relationships between people who live there and those who feel safe, can communicate their own emotions with much less suffering.

There is no doubt that those who have the best positions for help are the same people who live in the same environment. It is evident from the data of this investigation that friends are an important pillar for overcoming relationship problems. Among those who see bullying situations, viewers, living in an environment in which relations with authority are not sustained by fear, in which friendship and trust are valued, will certainly be characteristics designed to improve the quality of the school climate.

We can thus affirm that the implementation of Support Systems between Equals (SAIs) can contribute to the creation of a healthy climate, of coexistence and of respect of the different forms of exclusion and mistreatment. The data from this investigation shows that the Help Teams become a good strategy to support the prevention of major problems such as bullying.

Certainly, the current study, in its limitation, should be resumed in other moments of implementation of the Brazilian program in order to see progressive changes within the schools in which they are operating. In the same way, the present investigation points out gaps in the Brazilian education when it is desired a citizen formation.

There remains the warning about the long road ahead of us in the conquest that the works carried out today as handmade can take on a larger dimension and cover the countless schools in which children and adolescents suffer silently with the lack of more assertive relationships. Such pretensions lead us to understand the long trajectory that we still have in this country, to arrive at the organization, as in Spain, of public policies that support the need for coexistence

programs that put into action the forms of prevention and intervention to the problems that affect our students.

If we have laws in Brazil that ensure the right of students to find schools that prevent and combat all types of violence and that provide a culture of peace (Antibullying Act of 2015 incorporated into LDB in 2018), we are still a long way from consolidating the practice of these laws in order to organize, in our schools, work structures that are intentional, planned and systematized to improve the relational climate.

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